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THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF THE LADY SAINT CLARE



Photo: G. Carloforti

ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

(*By* SIMONE MEMMI. *Fresco in the Lower Church of San Francesco at Assisi*)

LIFE AND LEG...

OF

...ADY SAINT CL...

...TED FROM THE FRENCH VERSION (156...)

BROTHER FRANCIS DU PUIS BY

CHARLOTTE BALFOUR

...ITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

...THER CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.

...TH 24 ILLUSTRATIONS

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PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH VERSION (1563)
OF BROTHER FRANCIS DU PUIS BY
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THIS LITTLE BOOK

I DEDICATE

TO

THE MOTHER ABBESS

OF THE POOR CLARES AT ARUNDEL

in memory of her friendship with my husband, Reginald Balfour, of his respect and affection for her, and of his intention to write the life of St. Clare as a gift to her and her nuns. The notes of his original researches, made chiefly at Assisi itself, and a few sheets of MSS. only remain to show his intention. I have neither his scholarship nor knowledge to complete, as I should like to do, the work he began. Neither have I his Franciscan spirit, the inspiration of all he did. All I can do is to give the Legend of St. Clare in a new dress, and, in dedicating it to the Mother Abbess, I know that I express the wish of my husband. For it is to her that his book would have been dedicated if there had been time and leisure in his short and full life to finish it.

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THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF THE LADY SAINT CLARE

INTRODUCTION

I

Heroes and heroines may be marked off into two classes: those who *live* and those who *do*. Not that any deed is truly heroic which does not proceed from heroic life. A pigmy soul cannot produce a giant act. Nor, on the other hand, can the heroic life be without heroic deeds. But the distinction is valid inasmuch as it expresses a fundamental difference of character and immediate purpose. For with some men the soul's liberty is found in the pursuit and apprehension of some ideal of the perfect life. To such the external act is of secondary importance: what they aim at and desire is the realisation of the vision which goes before them. This vision of life is the central fact of their universe: it draws them apart from the multitude and surrounds them

with a certain mental and spiritual aloofness. Such men may act upon the world external to themselves, and frequently do; yet is their action, however grand, not the measure of their greatness nor essential to their greatness. The one thing essential is their apprehension of their ideal and the faithful moulding of their life upon it.

Otherwise is it with the man who is by nature a man of affairs—whose energies are called into action not by some interior vision of life, but by the needs and opportunities of the world outside himself. To him external action is a primary necessity. In the doing of things he finds himself.

To draw comparisons to the disparagement of either type of character were futile. Both are needful to the complete life of the human race. They are the complement to each other in the larger life of the world.

St. Clare of Assisi is representative of the former type. She was, as some would say, an idealist, but of the race of those idealists to whom the ideal comes weighted with a vital impulse and urgent sense of responsibility; so that the soul cannot rest till it has subjected itself utterly to its masterful vision. Such idealists are in a marked degree the moulders of the

world's conscience; for not only do they themselves become liegemen to their ideal, but by some inherent force they compel the homage of others, and in some measure bring them under its sway. And when the ideal is such as to compel men to reshape some fundamental concept of life, then is the idealist truly a maker of men. Such a one was St. Francis, the Poverello of Assisi; but he shares his glory with St. Clare. For she was his disciple, yet something more than a disciple, since to her was given a certain equality in the revealing and the guardianship of that sublime life of poverty which, after St. Francis, is called Franciscan. To him indeed the vision of High Poverty came first: he was the master and leader of that great Umbrian movement of the thirteenth century which meant so much to the Christian Church. But to St. Clare it was given in a preëminent degree to foster and to shield the creation of St. Francis, and to carve out its destiny.

From the earliest years of her coming into the Franciscan movement she became the counsellor of St. Francis. When he is in perplexity as to whether the friars should live apart from the world in religious solitude, or whether they ought to go forth and minister amongst men, he appeals

to her for a decision;[1] and, notwithstanding the sensitive reticence of the chroniclers, we know that he often consulted with her as to the significance and character of the Franciscan vocation.[2] At times, too, we find her defending the Poverello against himself in those moments of troublous visitation which came to him as to all men who are destined to open out the new paths.[3] Decisively did she declare for the active ministry of the friars against that insistent attraction which he himself felt for the contemplative life; and towards the end of his days we find her standing out firmly for the unity and liberty of the Franciscan family, when St. Francis himself was wavering. In truth she brought to St. Francis and the Franciscan movement a certain consistency and strength, a tenacious intuition of elemental issues, and an indomitable loyalty to the whole ideal of poverty which give her a sovereign place amongst the first Franciscans and proclaim her the supreme co-partner with the Poverello in the attempt to convert the Franciscan ideal into a world-reality.

This ideal was the exaltation of the beggar's estate into a condition of spiritual liberty, wherein man would live in conscious dependence upon

[1] Vide *infra*, p. 121. [2] *e.g.* vide *infra*, p. 84, *n.* 2.
[3] Vide *infra*, pp. 27, 121.

the providence of God and upon the goodwill of his fellow-men. It was an abandonment of oneself to faith in the love of God for his creature and in the principle of neighbourly good-will as the proper unitive element in Christian society. Hence whatever came between the soul and its sense of dependence on the Divine bounty was to be cast away, and whatever implied a disbelief in the rightful bond of charity between God's creatures was likewise anathema. And because the possession of property and pride of place tend to make the heart of man independent of God, and a stranger to the heart of his fellow-man, those early Franciscans utterly renounced all earthly property and social position and became beggars and as the least amongst men. And yet, because of the law of charity, did they make themselves servants to others, ministering to them both spiritually and temporally out of that which in their poverty they had to give, namely, the gift of human sympathy and service. Hence though they freely received of others, they also freely gave, taking as their example Jesus Christ in His earthly life.[1]

Now it was this exalted faith which St. Clare,

[1] Concerning the significance of Franciscan poverty, vide *The Friars, and how they came to England*, pp. 21–27; *The Lady Poverty*, translated by Montgomery Carmichael; Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Eng. trans. vol. vi. chap. iii.).

hardly yet in her eighteenth year, received from St. Francis, and she seems to have grasped at once, with the perfect intuition of genius, its innermost truth, and to have become mistress of its hidden mysteries; so that, with St. Francis, she walked confidently whither other disciples of the Poverello could but follow with more or less diffidence. The truth they found laboriously, blunderingly, she divined by swift intuition and so unerringly that her judgments have either determined the law of the order, or established a principle towards which the purest Franciscan spirits have unceasingly turned with expectant desire. She declared for the active ministry of the friars, for absolute poverty, and for the inclusion of the Poor Ladies[1] in the Franciscan family; and every attempt to reverse her decisions has manifestly diminished the pure

[1] "Poor Ladies" was the original name by which the sisters were designated. (*Cf.* 1 Celano, i. viii., ii. x.; 2 Celano, i. viii., ii. v., clv.) The name was probably due to St. Francis himself. (*Cf.* Testament of St. Clare: *Venite et adjuvate. . . . quoniam adhuc erunt dominæ*, &c., in *Seraph Legislationis Textus originales*, p. 274; also Rule of St. Clare, *ibid.*, p. 63). In the papal letters, however, they came to be styled, *Moniales pauperes*, *Pauperes inclusæ Damianitæ*. *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 36, 37, 62, 207, &c. This change of title is significant in view of the development of the order. Vide *infra*, p. 15. Urban IV. was the first to speak of the "Sisters of St. Clare"—*Sorores inclusæ ord. S. Claræ.* (Sbaralea, *ut supra*, p. 509.)

intensity of the Franciscan spirit and introduced amongst the professed disciples of St. Francis some extraneous element foreign to his ideal. Indeed take any incident in the life of St. Clare which is an authentic expression of her own mind, and you will find it pure Franciscan. Come to it after immersing your soul in the stories of the *Fioretti*—and that I take to be a test of the quality of things Franciscan—and you will find no break in the melody. And of how few of the followers of St. Francis can this be said! In some incident of their life you can almost invariably detect some influence of a spirit other than that of the Poverello;[1] but in St. Clare, never. And this is the more remarkable since, as we have noticed, she was not merely an echo of St. Francis, but in some instances an indepen-

[1] I am not referring here to such subverters of the Franciscan ideal as was Brother Elias, but to the true Franciscans intent on the observance of poverty. Thus, Haymo of Faversham would rather that the friars should cultivate the ground than that they should beg (vide Eccleston, col. x., ed. Little, p. 55); in St. Bonaventure there is a curious commingling of a friar of the primitive type with a statesman of the world. Even in Bl. John of Parma one misses the liberty of spirit of the first Franciscans. This, however, was to be expected in the history of so universal a movement as the Franciscan, and is no disparagement of that movement. Indeed had it been otherwise the Franciscan movement would have been the great exception in all history.

dent witness to the truth of his ideal. But it was not merely her clear and unerring perception of the Franciscan ideal which made her the heroine of the Franciscan movement. She was also its strongest defence in a time of dire need. What the Franciscan order owes to her in this matter has perhaps never been sufficiently recognised. Possibly had it not been for St. Clare the pure Franciscan ideal would have been lost after the death of St. Francis and been reckoned with those faiths that have come and gone because in the crucial moment, when doubt enters in amongst the believers, there is found not one of entire belief and sufficient strength of character to force the victory. But happily for the Franciscan ideal, St. Clare had at once an entire faith in it and a superb strength of character to give effect to her faith. Her strength of will she derived perhaps from the fighting stock of the Scefi family. She had been nurtured in an atmosphere of hard fighting and defence.[1] Never at any time was she known to fail in resolution

[1] The Scefi family had a long feud with the Ghislieri, and for many years the castle of Sasso Rosso, the feudal fortress of the Scefi, was being captured and recaptured by either party. At the time that St. Clare renounced the world Sasso Rosso was in the hands of the Ghislieri. (*Cf.* Tommaso Locatelli, ii. cap. i. p. 158 *seq.*)

and decision. In this matter, the manner of her becoming a Franciscan is indicative of her whole life. Having discovered her soul's need she allows nothing to baulk her. Her secret meetings with St. Francis and her flight at night-time from her father's house, and again the calm courage with which she meets her relatives when they come to the convent to bring her back home, proclaim at once the strong woman.[1] This same calm resolution is the rock against which in after years all efforts to induce her to relax her rule of poverty beat in vain. When Pope Gregory IX. offers her a dispensation from poverty, she unhesitatingly refuses to be "absolved from the following of Jesus Christ" in His poverty. Again when both as Cardinal Legate and later as Pope, Gregory compelled the Poor Ladies of other convents to accept possessions, St. Clare managed to keep inviolate the rule of Franciscan poverty for her own community at San Damiano; and in the end she induced another Pope to grant the liberty of Franciscan poverty to all the Poor Ladies. For thirty-four years had she need of that same indomitable resolution before that liberty was granted, as we shall see immediately.

[1] Vide *infra*, pp. 42–47.

And yet, even in withstanding others, she gained their reverence and affection. Marvellous was this power she had of compelling affection. Popes Gregory IX. and Innocent IV., whom she withstood in the matter of poverty, gave her an admiring affection which was in fact a sort of worship.[1] The clinging affection which united her and her sister Agnes is one of the beautiful things in the history of saints.[2] And in all that troublous period which followed immediately upon the death of St. Francis, when the zeal of many of the truest of his followers was somewhat clouded by bitterness, St. Clare herself stood consistently aloof from the acerbity and clamour of the struggle; no mist of partisanship dims her splendid loyalty to her ideal. Even with Brother Elias, her attitude is one of respectful allegiance, inasmuch as he is the head of the order;[3] and Elias on his part evidently stood her professed friend.[4]

Thus her strength is clothed with gracious-

[1] Vide the letter of Gregory IX. to St. Clare in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 183. Innocent IV. would have canonised her on the day of her burial but for the remonstrances of the Cardinals. Vide *infra*, p. 97.

[2] *Cf.* "Vita Agnetis" in *Anal. Franc.*, xiii. p. 173 *seq.*

[3] *Cf.* Letter of St. Clare to Bl. Agnes of Prague, *infra*, p. 143.

[4] *Cf.* Letter of St. Agnes to St. Clare, in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 175; Lempp., *Frère Elie de Cortone*, pp. 108–9.

ness, and her indomitable purpose with a sweet humility and an all-embracing charity; for her strength was the strength of a soul gifted with the faculty of a great love and an absorbing loyalty and raised above the pettinesses and weaknesses which ordinarily enter into the world's conflicts, by the complete immersion of her spirit in a higher world. Hence, notwithstanding the part she took in the struggle for the maintenance of St. Francis' ideal, she is always the embodiment of all the graces of the Lady Poverty—of the courtesy, joyousness, humility, and love which are the effulgence of the Franciscan ideal.[1] And as we gaze upon her thus, we no longer wonder that in her presence even the prudent of the world began to question their own prudence and to recognise a wisdom greater than their own.

II

Of her long struggle to keep aloft the noble banner of poverty but slight indications are given

[1] The mingled strength and graciousness of St. Clare's character is admirably depicted in Simone Memmi's fresco of the saint, in the right transept of San Francisco in Assisi. In fact, I know no portrait of St. Clare which is so entirely true to her history, unless it be that attributed to Cimabue in the chapel of St. Agnes in the church of Santa Chiara in Assisi.

in the Legend. This tells us indeed how she rejected the dispensation from poverty offered her by Gregory IX., and how she acted when the same Pope forbade the friars to visit the Poor Ladies. It also suggests the hesitancy of the Pope definitely to grant the Franciscan Rule to the sisters.[1] But the papal documents and other contemporary records supply abundance of detail, which prove how persistently and courageously St. Clare stood in defence of the Franciscan ideal.

It is difficult to say upon existing evidence how far the actual constitution of the communities of Poor Ladies represents St. Clare's own mind in the first instance, and how far it is the product of the legislative enactments of Cardinal Ugolino. What we may take as certain is that in the community of San Damiano, under the personal direction of St. Clare, the essential features of the Franciscan life were maintained, namely, absolute poverty and the liberty of spirit which went with the primitive conception of poverty; also at San Damiano, the idea was never lost that the Poor Ladies were an integral part of the Franciscan family, and properly subject, as were the friars, to the jurisdiction of St. Francis and his successors in the ministry of the Order. So closely

[1] Vide *infra*, pp. 56, 84.

was the community of San Damiano united with the friars, that they seem to have had no distinct rule, but to have observed the original Rule of the friars in as far as it could be adapted to their condition. Whether the idea of enclosure originated with St. Francis and St. Clare or with Cardinal Ugolino, we have not sufficient historical evidence from which to draw an incontrovertible conclusion; but it seems probable that it was due to the cardinal and acquiesced in by the saints.

The earliest witness to the life of the Poor Ladies, contained in a letter of Jacques de Vitry, written in 1216, is meagre and vague save on the point of poverty. Speaking of the Franciscan communities, he says: "The women live in divers hospices; they receive nothing, but live by the labour of their hands."[1] The assertion, "they receive nothing," would appear in contradiction to all we know of the early Franciscan life, if we take it to mean that the Poor Ladies did not accept alms. What, however, Jacques de Vitry probably meant was that they did not receive legacies or lands, or inheritances, such as other religious communities received so freely. Quite

[1] The letter of Jacques de Vitry has been published by M. Sabatier in his edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis;* also by Boehmer, *Analekten*, p. 94, and by Gubolovich, *Bibliotheca Bio-Bibliographica*, p. 5.

in accord with the life of the first friars is the statement that the sisters lived by the labour of their hands.[1] Yet here, too, one must beware of a misunderstanding. We must exclude from the thought of their labour the idea of bargaining for wages, which was repugnant to St. Francis' ideal poverty. The friars worked in the service of others freely and voluntarily; if they were remunerated they accepted what was offered, except money; otherwise they went a-begging. Even their wages they regarded as a free gift or alms. It is, however, clear that the Poor Ladies, equally with the friars, worked with their hands and gave service for the alms they received. But in what fashion they worked we can do little more than conjecture. Only this we have to go upon with certain knowledge, that St. Clare, even to the end of her days, worked altar linen which she sent to poor churches;[2] that Bl. Agnes of Prague, abbess of the Poor Ladies in that city and a particular friend of St. Clare, made clothing for the poor and tended the sick who were brought to her.[3] Of St. Clare herself and the

[1] Cf. *Regula Prima FF. Min.*, cap. vii.; *Testament of St. Francis; Vita B. Egidii* (in *Documenta Franc.*, ed. Lemmens), i. p. 42 *seq.*

[2] Vide *infra*, p. 73.

[3] *Cf.* "Vita B. Agnetis Bohem." in Bolland, *Acta SS.*, die 6 Mart., tom. vii. p. 519.

sisters at San Damiano, we are told that St. Francis sent the sick to them to be signed with the sign of the cross;[1] but whether the sisters also gave the sick corporal assistance it is not said, though it is not unlikely, seeing how largely the service of the lepers entered into the early life of the friars. Even so, we must not imagine to ourselves a community of Poor Ladies whose chief devotion would be to external activities in the manner of so many modern religious congregations. It is quite evident that the interior life was their essential preoccupation. Left to themselves, however, it is quite conceivable that they might have developed an external ministry in subordination to the contemplative life, even as did the friars. But here we are met by Cardinal Ugolino and his scheme for the reformation of the houses of religious women in Italy. As early as 1218 Ugolino, as Legate of the Holy See in Central and Northern Italy, received powers from Honorius III. to receive estates for the building of houses and oratories for virgins and other women fleeing from the world.[2] He had at this time made the acquaintance of St. Francis and

[1] Vide *infra*, p. 78 *seq*.
[2] Vide bull *Litteræ tuæ* of August 7, 1218 (Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 1).



perhaps of St. Clare;[1] but he was not yet Protector of the Order.[2] From his first introduction to St. Francis it is clear that the Cardinal had seized upon the Franciscan reform as a useful instrument for the carrying out of his own plans. He had no idea of accepting the Franciscan rule without reserves. Much as he evidently admired St. Francis, his instinct as a politician dealing with the world as he found it, made him doubt the practical nature of the Franciscan ideal as a rule for the ordinary religious. His intention was to take from the ideas of St. Francis what he thought might safely be applied in his own scheme of reformation. That the Cardinal was a politician and legalist is surely not to be accounted to him for blame; rather perhaps should it be a matter of commendation that being such, he was yet a man of deep piety and zeal for religion. He was one of Innocent the Third's cardinals, and wholly imbued with that Pontiff's spirit of reform. As a practical man of affairs he had the entire confidence of Honorius III. Unfortunately Ugo-

[1] According to some, Ugolino was present at the general chapter in Assisi at the Pentecost of 1218, in which case he would probably have visited San Damiano.

[2] He became Protector after St. Francis' return from the East. ("Chron. Jordani" in *Anal. Franc.*, i. p. 5; Glassberger in *Anal. Franc.*, ii. p. 17; *Leg.* 3 *Soc.* xvi.)

lino does not seem to have considered that it might have been better to allow the Franciscan movement to develop on its own lines, whilst side by side with it he might have applied his own reform to other religious communities. His aim was to amalgamate the Franciscans with his own scheme of reformation. And to this well-intentioned and, from one point of view, practical purpose, much of the confusion was due which came to the Franciscan Order in after days. Ugolino, from the best of motives, brought a cross-purpose into the movement initiated by St. Francis. With the friars the Cardinal had less of a free hand, for their rule had already been approved by Innocent III.; but as legate he claimed jurisdiction over the Poor Ladies, nor did he acknowledge that the sanction given by Pope Innocent to the rule of the friars covered that rule as adapted to the life of the Poor Ladies.[1] He felt at liberty, therefore, to impose upon them, by virtue of his legatine authority, a rule of his own making, for which he obtained the formal approbation of Honorius III.[2] This rule declared that the Poor Ladies were under the Rule of

[1] Vide bull *Angelis gaudium* addressed by Gregory IX. to B. Agnes of Prague (Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 242).

[2] Cf. bull *Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia* of December 9, 1219 (Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 3–5).

St. Benedict, the common rule of monastic communities, but as modified by constitutions drawn up by Ugolino himself. These constitutions, purely legalistic in character, were modelled on existing monastic observances, but were of a more severe type. There was nothing distinctively Franciscan about them, save as regards the dress to be worn by the sisters.[1] The Poor Ladies were to observe a perpetual fast and a continual silence, and perpetual enclosure was made a cardinal law. No mention is made in these constitutions of the rule of Franciscan poverty; Ugolino's intention being that the sisters should observe the usual monastic law of a community of goods.[2]

When the Cardinal first imposed this rule upon the Poor Ladies, St. Francis was in the East. To St. Clare the acceptance of this rule meant nothing less than a turning aside from the path she had chosen seven years before in the little chapel of the Portiuncula, and one can imagine the amazement and affliction of soul with which she received it.[3] No sooner did St.

[1] The Rule of Ugolino will be found in the bull *Cum omnis* of May 24, 1239 (Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 263–67); also in bull *Solet annuere* of November 13, 1245 (*ibid.*, pp. 394–99), and, with certain modifications, in the bull *Cum omnis* of August 5, 1247 (*ibid.*, pp. 476–83).

[2] This is evident from the bull *Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia* ut supra.

[3] *Cf.* Cozza-Luzi, *S. Chiara di Assisi*, pp. 34–6.

Francis return than she appealed to him against the new Rule.

According to Wadding, before St. Francis went to the East, he had surrendered to Ugolino the direction of all communities of Poor Ladies, saving that of San Damiano, which was to remain under his own jurisdiction.[1] Clearly St. Francis had intended to safeguard for St. Clare that "privilege of poverty" which had already been

[1] *Annales*, ad an. 1219. It is to be noted that the first convents of Poor Ladies after San Damiano were convents which had long been in existence, but, under the influence of the Franciscan movement, had embraced a stricter poverty. These convents, however, did not comprise all who set themselves to imitate St. Clare in her life of poverty. There are evidences that outside the regular communities there were many women who professed to live the life and who even assumed the habit of the Poor Ladies. The legend itself tells us that a vast number of maidens, inspired by the accounts they heard of St. Clare's life, but unable to embrace the cloistered life, "endeavoured to live as religious in their own homes, without being bound by monastic rules" (vide *infra*, p. 49). That this extra-conventual following of St. Clare continued even as late as 1251, we know from papal letters. In 1241, Gregory IX. denounced those who went about in the world, wearing the habit of the Poor Ladies and calling themselves "Minoresses" or "Barefooted" or "Cord-wearers" (Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 209). In 1250, and again in 1251, Innocent IV. issued similar letters, calling upon the bishops to suppress these "wandering Minoresses." (*Cf.* Sbaralea, *ut supra*, pp. 541 and 556.) An identical letter was sent to the Archbishop of York on August 17, 1251 (The Register of Walter Giffard, Archbishop of York—Surtees Soc., p. 93).

granted her by Innocent III., whereby St. Clare and her sisters were not to be compelled to receive possessions.[1] Possibly this privilege had been granted to the sisters of San Damiano in 1215, in which year St. Clare assumed the title and office of abbess at the command of St. Francis.[2] It is not unlikely that the Bishop of Assisi, or perhaps Innocent himself, desired that the community at San Damiano should be canonically established, and that the assumption of the title of abbess and the granting of the privilege of poverty were consequent upon this canonical institution. And it may have been then that St. Francis, as a safeguard to this privilege, gave St. Clare and her sisters a written pledge that he and his brethren would have a

[1] Vide *infra*, p. 55. It has been disputed whether the "Privilege of Poverty" referred to in the legend refers to a grant by Innocent III. or to the Rule approved by Innocent IV. The Bollandist legend, which speaks only of Pope Innocent, without the numeral, leaves the point disputable. But the Assisi MS. says distinctly Innocent III. Moreover St. Clare mentions the fact in her Testament: "Solicita fui a Domino Papa Innocentio *sub cujus tempore cœpimus* et ab aliis successoribus suis, nostram professionem sanctissimæ paupertatis, quam et Patri nostro promisimus, cum privilegiis facere corroborari." (Cf. *Seraphicæ Legislationis Textus orig.*, p. 277, also pp. 22, 23). *Cf.* Glassberger, in *Anal. Franc.*, tom. ii. p. 8; *Firmamenta Trium Ord.*, fol. v. coll. 1, 2.; *Orbus Seraphicus*, lib. xi. cap. iv. *n.* 71.

[2] Vide *infra*, p. 52.

special care of them and succour them in their needs.[1]

At any rate on St. Francis' return from the East, Clare's protest was so far effectual that she herself and her community at San Damiano were reinstated in the liberty of Franciscan poverty.[2] But this liberty was restricted to the community of San Damiano. Moreover Ugolino neither granted himself as Protector of the Order, which he had now become, nor obtained from the Holy See, any formal confirmation of the privilege granted to St. Clare. His own constitutions were to be the normal Rule of the Poor Ladies; St.

[1] "*Volo et promitto per me et fratres meos semper habere de vobis tanquam de ipsis curam diligentem et sollicitudinem specialem.*" St. Clare inserted this pledge in her Rule. (*Vide* "Regula S. Claræ," cap. vi. in *Seraph. Legilat. Text.*, p. 62.)

[2] Wadding (*Annales* ad an. 1224) says St. Francis *and Ugolino* wrote a new Rule for St. Clare. Certainly Ugolino's constitutions concerning the perpetual fast, silence, and enclosure, were observed at San Damiano and appear in St. Clare's Rule of 1253. But it is to be noted in regard to the fast, that St. Francis introduced a regulation of sweet reasonableness which was absent from Ugolino's original constitutions. *Vide* the third letter of St. Clare to Agnes of Prague (Bolland, *Acta SS.*, die 6 Mart., tom. vii. p. 507): "Praeter debiles et infirmos, quibus quoscumque cibos cum omni sollicitudine dari *admonuit* [S. Franciscus] *ac imperavit.*" Cf. *infra*, p. 149. Ugolino's constitutions ordered the sisters at all times to use only Lenten foods. In her own Rule St. Clare ordains the perpetual fast, but says nothing about using only Lenten food. Cf. *Regula S. Claræ*, cap. iii.

Clare's privilege was purely a special exemption which might be revoked whenever it was deemed fitting to do so. That St. Clare was not content thus to be exempted whilst her sisters in other places were obliged to receive possessions, we have every reason to believe. With her as with St. Francis, the life of absolute poverty was a liberty of the children of God, and though in all humble deference to those in authority in the Church, yet nevertheless firmly and consistently did she plead for the liberty of poverty for all who wished to embrace it. No further incident, however, seems to have happened during the lifetime of St. Francis. Clare, in her intense filial devotion, probably left her destiny in his keeping. But two years after her spiritual father's death, Cardinal Ugolino, now raised to the papal chair as Gregory IX., came to Assisi to canonise his friend, and again he endeavoured to induce St. Clare to relinquish her privilege, offering to dispense her from any vow which might stand in the way. Then it was that she replied: "Holy Father, never shall I wish to be absolved from following Jesus Christ."[1] This is the only direct intimation we have of what passed between the Pope and the spiritual

[1] Vide *infra*, p. 56.

daughter of St. Francis in the interviews which took place on this occasion; but we may gather something of the arguments used by St. Clare from the momentous document which Gregory IX. sent her two months later, a letter evidently written under the influence of her personality and words.[1] By this letter, dated September 17, 1228, Gregory formally confirmed to her the privilege of poverty, which Innocent III. had granted orally. The wording of the letter is as beautiful as its subject was momentous in the life of San Damiano and the whole Franciscan order. After the official greeting to his "beloved daughters in Christ, Clare and the other handmaidens of Christ dwelling in the Church of Saint Damian," the document runs thus: "As is manifest, in your yearning to be dedicated to our Lord alone, you have renounced the desire of temporal things: for which reason, having sold all and distributed to the poor, you propose to have no possessions whatever, but through all, to keep close to the footsteps of Him who for us became poor—Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; neither does the lack of needful things deter you from this purpose, since the left Hand of the Heavenly

[1] The Pope was still at Perugia when he wrote this letter.

Spouse is under your head for the sustaining of the weaknesses of your body, which you have subdued to the law of your mind by ordered charity: finally, He who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field will not be wanting to you whether for food or raiment, until, passing into eternity, He will give you Himself—to wit, when His right Hand will more happily embrace you in the fulness of His Vision: therefore, as you have besought, we confirm by our apostolic favour your vow of most high Poverty, and by the authority of these presents, grant that by nobody can you be compelled to receive possessions."[1] The words of this letter are the words of Gregory, but undoubtedly the spirit is the spirit of St. Clare, and in this document, as I have said, we have an echo of the pleadings with which the lover of poverty met the arguments of the Pontiff.

But though Gregory IX. at length recognised the wisdom of conceding to St. Clare the cherished liberty of absolute poverty, he yet refused to allow the extension of this liberty to other houses

[1] Cf. *Seraph. Legisl. Text.*, pp. 97–8; Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 771. The original document is preserved in the convent of Santa Chiara in Assisi. The scriptural quotations are so deftly interwoven that I make no attempt to give references.

of Poor Ladies; these, he insisted, must observe his own constitutions and receive possessions and revenues sufficient to sustain the community;[1] and when in 1238 Blessed Agnes of Prague, foundress and abbess of the house in that city, besought permission to live according to the rule of San Damiano, Gregory refused to allow it.[2] In this petition of the Blessed Agnes one sees the moving spirit of St. Clare; for the abbess of San Damiano had written to the younger abbess burning letters in praise of poverty.[3] In one letter she writes: "Should any one insinuate to you anything contrary to your perfection and holy vocation, give no heed, even though you be thereby enabled to obtain honours and goods that would exalt you above all people. This is not what you aspire to. Live in poverty; hold fast to Jesus who made Himself so poor."

Gregory IX. died in 1241, and after the brief pontificate of Celestine IV., Innocent IV. ascended the papal throne in 1243. This Pontiff, even more than Gregory IX., favoured the party of

[1] *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 47, 73, 124, 125, 127, 207, 242. An exception, however, seems to have been made in the case of St. Clare's sister Agnes and her community at Monticelli, Florence. See the letter of St. Agnes to St. Clare in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 176.

[2] *Cf.* ibid., p. 242.

[3] Vide *infra*, p. 143.

compromise in the Franciscan Order. He greatly troubled the more fervent brethren by his decree *Ordinem vestrum* in which he threw open the door to the acquiring of revenues under a legal fiction, declaring that though the friars might not themselves receive property, yet they might appoint procurators to receive goods for their use. This declaration was rejected by the friars at the Chapter of Metz, chiefly through the action of the English delegates.[1]

In 1245 Innocent solemnly confirmed the constitutions of Ugolino as the rule of the Poor Ladies, and he repeated the confirmation in 1247, but with an important modification, for in this latest version of the constitutions he inserted a declaration that the Poor Ladies were established under the Rule of St. Francis, and not, as in the original version, under the Rule of St. Benedict. At first sight it might seem that the concession meant nothing or worse than nothing; for to insure the intention of Ugolino being carried out, Innocent now added a new regulation expressly declaring that the sisters were to receive and hold property in common.[2] But the change of wording indicates an important issue

[1] Eccleston, *De Adventu FF. Min.*, coll. ix. [ed. Little] p. 52.

[2] An explicit declaration to this effect was not needed as long as the sisters were held to be under the Rule of St. Benedict.

in the struggle, which had been in evidence since 1219. With a true instinct, St. Clare had all through claimed that she and her sisters should be considered members of the Franciscan family, and not of the Benedictine. It was not a matter of mere sentiment, but of vital truthfulness to her ideal and life. If the Poor Ladies were Benedictines they had no legitimate claim to the privilege of Franciscan poverty; it was otherwise if they belonged to the Franciscan Order. As we have seen, St. Francis, in deference to Cardinal Ugolino, had practically disowned the Poor Ladies, except those at San Damiano.[1] St. Clare never ceased

[1] For a time St. Francis even withdrew from personal intercourse with San Damiano. (*Cf.* 2 Celano, ii. 155.) This was probably immediately after his return from the East, when certain incidents had evidently made him fear lest intercourse with the sisters might lead to some abuse. Brother Philip, who had been appointed by Cardinal Ugolino, Visitor of the Poor Ladies, had, in St. Francis' absence, applied to the Holy See for certain privileges for them, a proceeding which was opposed to the mind of the saint (*cf.* Chron. Jordani, in *Anal. Franc.*, tom. i. p. 5; "Test. S. Franc." in *Seraph. Legislat. Text.*, p. 268). Another brother had gathered together a band of lepers of both sexes, with whom he wandered about the country, much to the disedification of the people.

It is not unlikely that the incident related in the *Fioretti*, cap. xiv. (vide *infra*, p. 117) had some relation to this withdrawal of St. Francis from San Damiano, and that St. Clare's intention was to prevent a complete rupture between the friars and the Poor Ladies. This chapter of the *Fioretti* should be read in connection with 2 Celano, ii. 155, *n.* 205.

to claim for all her sisters, of whatever community, their Franciscan birthright. Whatever the legalists might say about the Poor Ladies and the Friars Minor being two distinct orders, she claimed that they were one spiritual family, united morally in their aspiration towards the same ideal and in the leadership of St. Francis. Hence she always regarded the ministers of the Friars Minor as the directors and superiors of the convents of the sisters. In the letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague already quoted, she bade the younger abbess "obey the commandments of our Lord, and the counsels of our Father, Brother Elias, *Minister General of the whole Order*." These words, taken in connection with her insistence on absolute poverty, strike the keynote of St. Clare's policy. Already in 1219 Cardinal Ugolino had marked his government of the Poor Ladies by appointing a Cistercian monk to be their visitor and director;[1] shortly afterwards, however, perhaps at the petition of St. Clare, he revoked the appointment and selected a Friar Minor. Again in 1227, at the request of the Poor Ladies themselves, Gregory IX. placed them under the direction of the

[1] Wadding, *Annales*, ad an. 1219; Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 46.

Friars Minor;[1] but in 1230 the famous bull *Quo elongati* forebade the friars to visit the houses of Poor Ladies without special licence from the Holy See. It seems that upon receipt of this bull the ministers of the friars withdrew the brethren who had the spiritual direction of San Damiano, but were willing to allow lay-brethren to quest for the sisters. But when this was made known to St. Clare, she with a sorrowful dignity bade the lay-brethren go back to their minister since she had no further need for those who supplied bodily food, if she was to be deprived of those who brought spiritual food. Whereupon Pope Gregory hearing this, immediately revoked his prohibition; and for the remaining years of his pontificate, the friars seem to have ministered to the Poor Ladies both for spiritual and temporal needs. Yet the question as to the Franciscan title of the Poor Ladies remained open. In 1243 Blessed Agnes of Prague elicited from Innocent IV. the declaration that though the Poor Ladies were said to be under the Rule of St. Benedict, this was but to give them a canonical title to be regarded as nuns.[2] But St. Clare and her sisters wanted

[1] Vide bull *Quoties cordis* of Nov. 14, 1227; Sbaralea, *ibid.*, pp. 36–7.
[2] *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 317–18.

a more positive acknowledgment of their Franciscan character, and this Innocent conceded in his bull *Cum omnis* of August 5, 1247. Not unlikely this concession had been urged by the Poor Ladies in view of the fact that the Minister-General Crescentius had in 1245 petitioned the Holy See to relieve the friars from all services to the sisters. Innocent, however, had then refused,[1] but in 1250, and again in 1252, the friars succeeded in throwing off the charge.[2] These must have been sad years for St. Clare. Not only was the Pope insisting that the Poor Ladies should hold property, but the friars themselves seemed determined to sever all bonds of fraternal union with the sisters. Yet was the reward of her indomitable patience at hand. Innocent IV. had, as we have said, acknowledged that the Poor Ladies were under the Rule of St. Francis, and yet had refused them the privilege of poverty; but it was the final stand of Ugolino's spirit of doubt against St. Clare's splendid optimism. If the sisters were under the Rule of St. Francis, why deny them its essential principle and law? Six years, however, were to go by before

[1] The same year the Pope charged the friars with services for the sisters. *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 367–68, 387–88.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 538, 619.

the only logical answer was given, when Innocent, at the instance of Cardinal Rainaldo, Protector of the Order, solemnly approved the Rule of St. Clare as the normal rule for all communities of the Poor Ladies; and in this Rule two principles are laid down and established, namely, that the Poor Ladies are to observe absolute poverty as taught by St. Francis, and that they are under the jurisdiction and direction of the Friars Minor.[1] Ugolino's laws concerning the enclosure, silence, and fasting were, with some modifications, retained; but the Poor Ladies passed definitely into the Franciscan family.[2] The Rule of St. Clare was confirmed on August 9, 1253; two days later, on August 11, Clare passed from the warfare of earth into the peace of heaven.

[1] St. Clare insists in five several chapters upon the dependence of the sisters upon the friars, viz. in cap. i., iii., iv., vi., xii. Cardinal Rainaldo, as Protector of the Order, had already sanctioned the Rule in 1252. It was then probably that St. Clare gave the Rule its final shape. *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. pp. 671–78; *Seraph. Legislat. Text.*, pp. 49–95.

[2] In 1263 Urban IV. practically revived the Rule of Ugolino for those convents which wished for a mitigated poverty ("*Beata Clara*" of October 18, 1263—Sbaralea, *ibid.*, ii. p. 509); but the Rule of Ugolino now became the exception, whilst the Rule of St. Clare remained the normal Rule of the Poor Clares.

III

There is a picture which represents St. Clare holding aloft the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament, and with her confident worship putting to flight the enemy who have attacked the monastery of San Damiano. That picture might well be taken as symbolising the saint's life—her long struggle with the world's prudence and the exalted faith and loving worship with which she overcame. And because the weapons of her warfare were of so sublime a nature, her spirit was ever trustful and calm, as one assured of ultimate victory. Hence, though after the first seven years of her vocation she had need to be ever watchful and on the defence, yet did the spirit of peace brood upon the waters of her life. And one might be her frequent visitant and see nought of her life's struggle, but only its loving ministries and glowing worship and its thirst for a greater knowledge of the mysteries of life. It is into the atmosphere of this noble peace that we pass in the pages of the Legend which follows; there we may live in thought the life of Most High Poverty which was the joy of St. Francis and St. Clare. And for this I for one am thankful,

that he who wrote the Legend brushed aside the transitory clamours which belong to the outer world, and concerned himself only to depict the beauteous nobility which belongs to St. Clare's own soul. Thus does the legend retain that atmosphere of peace, born of an intense spiritual life, which seems still to linger around the monastery of San Damiano, whether you visit it in the glare of the morning sun, or in the mellow light before the sunset. For at San Damiano St. Clare verily made an enclosure, fenced round with her own great faith and trust; and because it was so enclosed, the true children of poverty found in her a sense of home and a liberty of spirit denied them elsewhere. Hither came St. Francis in his last years, when the clouds were gathering over the *Civitas Dei* of his love, and here in the sunlight of the faith which filled San Damiano he sang out his song of praise for all creatures.[1] Here, into the understanding ears of St. Clare he spoke the thoughts that arose in him concerning his Order,[2] and revealed to her the secrets of

[1] Cf. *Fioretti*, cap. xviii. It was during this sojourn at San Damiano that he is said to have composed the Canticle of the Sun. Cf. *Spec. Perf.* [ed. Sabatier], cap. cxix.

[2] *Cf.* the story of Brother Giles and the preacher, *infra*, p. 84.

God, of which he spoke to few others.[1] And after St. Francis' death, those who had been with him in the beginning often came to San Damiano, seeking the peace and courage which they found there. Clare welcomed them all for the spirit of God which was in them, from Brother Juniper, whom she was wont to call "the plaything of the Lord," to reverend Brother Giles. But especially delighted was she when a brother came whose words were weighted with wisdom and whose manner of speech was well ordered and refined.[2]

So here we leave the Legend to tell its own tale and bring the reader into some knowledge of this gracious "keeper of the vineyards" of Franciscan poverty.

The Legend here rendered into English is the primitive Legend of St. Clare, written about the time of her canonisation by order of Pope Alexander IV., who, as Cardinal Rainaldo, had been the

[1] St. Clare was one of the few to whom he spoke of the Stigmata, and it was her privilege to prepare bandages to staunch his wounds. She also made him a pair of soft sandals to ease his pierced feet. The sandals and some of the bandages are amongst the relics at S. Chiara in Assisi.

If we may credit the witnesses of Bartholi in his *Tractatus*, St. Francis told St. Clare the secret history of the Portiuncula Indulgence (*ibid.* [ed. Sabatier], p. 96).

[2] Vide *infra*, p. 84.

saint's friend in the last years of her life. Who the author was is a matter of conjecture. At one time it was attributed to St. Bonaventure,[1] but more recently and generally to Thomas of Celano, the biographer of St. Francis. The authorship, however, is very doubtful, whether considered from internal or external evidence.

The Latin text was published by the Bollandists,[2] but their text would seem to have suffered from the hand of an interpolator, who inserted passages from other chronicles.

The present English version has been made from a French translation of the sixteenth century, the work of one Frère François Dupuis,[3] who evidently had before him a purer text than that published by the Bollandists; for the French translation lacks those passages which the Bollandists regard as interpolations. Excepting that the French version omits the prologue and the passages concerning the saint's canonisation, it follows very closely the manuscript in the muni-

[1] It is included in the edition of the works of St. Bonaventure, published at Trent in 1774.

[2] *Acta SS.*, sub die 12 Augusti, ed. 1867, tom. ii. p. 742 *seq.*

[3] Recently edited by Arnold Goffin [Librairie Blond et Cie., Paris] from a MS. in the Bibliothèque de Lyon. *Cf.* Catalogue Delandine, No. 775; Catalogue Desvernay, No. 870.

cipal library in Assisi.[1] But there is a beauty of diction all its own in Dupuis' rendering. The more notable variants from the Bollandist text have been noted in the course of the English translation. But for a critical study of the Legend and of the existing MSS., I commend my readers to the recently published work of Fr. Paschal Robinson, O.F.M., than whom there is no safer guide upon that subject.[2]

FR. CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.

[1] A critical edition of this MS. is promised by Prof. Francesco Pennacchi.

[2] Fr. Paschal Robinson's *Life of St. Clare* appeared when this volume was already in the hands of the publisher.



Photo: G. Carloforti

ST. CLARE OF ASSISI AND SCENES FROM HER LIFE

(*Ascribed to* CIMABUE. *Fresco in Church of Santa Chiara, Assisi*)

LIFE AND LEGEND OF SAINT CLARE

Here is begun the Life of the Lady Saint Clare; how she was born and how she lived and died.[1]

In the city of Assisi was a wonderful woman, Clare by name, a woman full of virtue and born of true gentlefolks. And in this city was born Master Saint Francis. And the Lady Saint Clare reigned with him in this earthly life and went with him into the eternal life. Her father was a soldier, and all her lineage, by her father as by her mother, was drawn from soldiers. Her father's house was abundant in goods and riches after the manner of that country. Her mother was named Hortolana, that is to say, Gardener. For she was to plant the garden of Holy Church with a plant full of good fruit; for though she was married and tied by the cares of the world,

[1] The French legend omits the prologue which is affixed to the Latin legend.

she always directed her intention with all her power to the service of God. She was attentive always to acts of piety, and out of her great devotion she went over the seas and visited the Holy Places which God had made holy by His bodily presence, and returned with great joy. And she went then to St. Michael the Archangel[1] to pray to him devoutly. And then with still greater devotion she returned by way of Rome and visited the holy places of the Apostles. But why do I thus make long preamble? The tree is known by its fruits. The good fruit is the meed of the good tree. The abundance of the fruits of God was generously rooted in this tree, for the branches were full of holiness. For when this lady of whom I tell you was to give birth to a child and was near the time of her deliverance, it happened that she was praying intently to Our Saviour before the crucifix at the monastery, that He would deliver her from her perils to the safety of faith, and at that time heard a voice which said to her: "Woman, have no fear, for you will bear your child safely, and

[1] The church of St. Michael, on Monte Gargano, in Apulia, was one of the famous shrines in the Middle Ages. Brother Giles, the third companion of St. Francis, included St. Michael's in the list of his pilgrimages. *Cf.* Lemmens, *Documenta Antiqua Franc.*, i. pp. 41–2; *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 77.

will save a torch which will give a clear light to the world." When she had heard this she departed, and when she was delivered she commanded that her daughter should be called Clare. For she hoped truly for the light and clearness that God had promised her should be fulfilled in her daughter.[1]

How she lived in the House of her Father.

When she was still both young and little, this Clare began to live clearly in the shadow of the world, and as she grew older to shine in prowess of good deeds. Her heart was so docile that she kept in it all the good lessons that her mother taught her. This was no marvel, for the Holy Spirit was in her and embraced her heart. In very truth her body was so pure that it shewed plainly it was a vessel full of grace. Her hands were so open to the poor that out of the goods which abounded in the house of her father she relieved the sufferings of many poor folk. And thus from her child-

[1] Clare was born in Assisi in 1194, and was baptized in the cathedral of S. Ruffino, where also St. Francis was baptized. To this day the cathedral baptistery is the only one in the city, and all the children born in the city are brought there for baptism.

hood pity and compassion grew in her heart and her thoughts. For the sufferings of the poor grieved her much. She loved holy prayer so much, and felt so often the sweet fragrance thereof, that little by little she attained to the heavenly life; and for that she had no pater-nosters[1] on which she could make her devotions, she made heaps of little stones, and thus paid her devotions to Our Lord in orderly manner. And when holy love began first to weigh on her heart, the love and the flower of worldly things seemed to her but smoke and a false painting of short durance, and for this it seemed to her they should be despised. And when the Holy Spirit had taught her, worldly love became to her a hard thing, and it did not draw her, but rather wearied her. She wore a hair shirt secretly beneath her robes, and thus she shewed herself in worldly dress without, but within her heart was clothed with God. And when her friends desired greatly to marry her, she would in no wise consent, because she wished to preserve her virginity for Our Lord. Thus she seemed a chamber full of good teaching and of good, sweet-smelling spices, although she knew not of it. But the fragrance was so

[1] Rosary.



ST. CLARE DISTRIBUTING ALMS TO THE POOR BEFORE HER FATHER'S HOUSE

great in her that it was felt by others. The neighbours praised her often, and the fame of the neighbours' praise and of these good deeds was spread amongst the people.

How she became acquainted with Master St. Francis.

When she heard tell of the great fame of Master St. Francis, who was like a man newly renewed with new virtues, and was teaching to the world the way of perfection, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit she desired much to see and hear him.[1] And St. Francis, too, taught by the Holy Spirit, when he heard the fame of this most gracious maiden, desired no less to speak with her; for he would willingly rive her from the world and steal her from earthly things, and give back such noble prey to Our Lord. He went to her and she to him often, and so discreetly, according

[1] St. Francis began to preach publicly after his return from Rome in 1209 or 1210, having been commissioned by Pope Innocent III. to preach penance to the people. His first preaching was in the church of St. George (now a chapel in the great church of Santa Chiara), but almost immediately he was invited by the canons to preach regularly in the cathedral, whither the citizens flocked to listen to him. (*Cf.* S. Bonaventura, *Leg. Maj.*, iv. 4; "Chron. Jordani à Jano," 50, in *Anal. Franc.*, i. p. 16.)

to the will of God, did they visit each other, that no one perceived it, nor could any rightly think or speak ill of their meetings. For when she went to the man of God, St. Francis, to hear his words so ardent and burning, whose works seemed such works as were beyond the power of all, she went by a very secret way, and took one only companion who was her loyal friend.[1] Then did Master St. Francis admonish her with lively words to despise the world and the deceitful vanity and the dry hope that is in it. And he showed her gently the words of Our Blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. And he admonished her that she should keep her precious virginity and that she should be the spouse of Him who for love of us had willed to become mortal man. And how can I tell you rightly of it all? So well did St. Francis admonish her, her dear father as well as her faithful counsellor, that she consented. And soon she grew to know God and His goodness, and despised like filth the world in comparison with the joys of Paradise. And it was as though her heart began to be completely arrested by the good things of Paradise. And when God

[1] This loyal companion is supposed to have been her aunt, Buona Guelfuccio, who afterwards joined Clare at San Damiano, taking the name of Pacifica. *Cf.* Ant. Cristofani, *Delle Storie di Assisi*, ed. 1902, p. 92.



ST. CLARE GOES SECRETLY AT NIGHT TO JOIN ST. FRANCIS AND HIS COMPANY

The engraver is in error in depicting so many spectators, as St. Clare went with one comanpion only.

had lit within her His holy fire she despised entirely the vain glory and vanity of this world so much that no merriment nor joys of the world could hold back or mingle with her good intention. All fleshly delights were hideous to her. And she proposed within her heart never again to have any earthly pleasure, but to make of her body a temple to Our Saviour. And thenceforward she strove with great strength so that she might be the spouse of the King of Paradise. Then she put herself entirely under the counsels of St. Francis, and established him for always as her director and counsellor. And from thenceforward she followed altogether the counsels of St. Francis. And she kept in her heart all the holy words she spoke of sweet Jesus. And although she wished to gain Jesus Christ she wore with great sorrow all the beauty and ornaments of the world. And all that pleases in the world and all the beauty seemed to her like filth.

How St. Francis took her out of the World and put her into Religion.

St. Francis hastened to take this Clare out of this world full of darkness so that the ways of this world should not corrupt her youth and her

good thought. One day before Palm Sunday came this maiden, who became the servant of St. Francis, to him and consulted him much about her conversion when she should leave the world.[1] And St. Francis commanded her that on Palm Sunday[2] she should array herself with palms and ornaments, and that the night after she should tear herself from the world, and be converted with tears to the death and passion of Our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

And on the Sunday the maiden went adorned and resplendent amongst the other ladies to the minster. And it happened as though according to a prophecy, for when the others hastened each to take their reeds, this Clare, who was gentle, did not move from her place. And the Bishop came down the two steps and came to her and put a palm into her hand. And she, who desired to flee the world and obey the command of St.

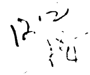
[1] Bartholomew of Pisa relates a curious story, how, to try the resolution of St. Clare, St. Francis said to her: "If thou dost wish, as I believe thou dost, clothe thyself in sackcloth and go begging for bread throughout the entire city of Assisi." And he adds: "This she did, but was not known" by the people. Vide *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 352.

[2] Palm Sunday in the year 1212 (the year of St. Clare's conversion to the religious life) was on March 18th; consequently she took the habit of religion in the early hours of March 19th.

Palmarum die, in turbâ dominarum, ſplendore feſtiuo, puella præradians, cùm reliquis intrat eccleſiam: vbi ceteris ad ramos concurrentibus, dum CLARA *præ verecundiâ, ſuo in loco maneret immota: Pontifex ad eam accedens, palmam eius manibus præbuit.* Vita cap. 4.

5.

THE BISHOP GIVES THE PALM TO ST. CLARE UPON PALM SUNDAY



Francis, the night after arrayed herself and departed with good and honest companions.

But she wished not to go by a frequented place, so she entered by a door much barred and obstructed with stones. And God gave her such marvellous strength that she opened it with her own hands. And thus she left the city of her friends and relations, and went to the monastery of Our Lady of the Little Portion, there where the Brothers Minor lived then with Master St. Francis. And when she came they received her with great joy.[1] She threw away all the pleasures and lusts of the world, and gave to the world the word of refusal, and bent her head to the brothers for the cutting of her hair, and left all her elegances. For it would not have been right that the last order of virgins should begin to flourish elsewhere but in the monastery of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. And also this was the place where began the order of the Brothers Minor under Master St. Francis, from which one may see that it is the sacred spot where the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, brought to birth one and the other religious order. As soon as the most humble handmaid Clare had taken the

[1] In the Bollandist legend of St. Clare it is said that the brethren received her with lighted torches.

habit of penitence before the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and had become the Spouse of Jesus Christ, then Master St. Francis took her to a Church of St. Paul[1] until that God had provided a place where she could live beseemingly.

How she maintained herself against the Assaults of her Relations.

When the news came to her relations their hearts were tormented, and they maligned her good intention, and all ran together to the place where the virgin was, to tempt her, a thing which could not be. First they wished to drag her out by force, and then afterwards by evil counsel they promised her many things, and prayed her to leave this folly, which set not a good example and appertained not to her lineage. But she clung to the cloths on the altar of her heavenly Father, and showed to them her head all shaven, and affirmed that never would she depart from the service of God. And the more her parents strove to draw her away from her good purpose

[1] The Benedictine convent of San Paolo at Bastia, about two miles from the Portiuncula. Only the church now remains, the convent having been destroyed in the fourteenth century, to make way for a fortress.



ST. CLARE BEING RECEIVED INTO THE FRANCISCAN ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

(*By permission of the Vasari Society*)

the greater grew her love of doing right. For the love she had for God gave her grace to suffer peaceably all the cruel things they said to her. And she was tormented by her worldly friends in order to draw her from her good purpose. And they ran together to the place where the virgin was. But for all that her good purpose and courage were not moved nor her fervour; thus she endured words of blame and enclosed her heart in holy thoughts and good hope so that her parents left her in that country.

And after a little she went to the church of St. Angelo in Panso.[1] And when she saw that there she could not have perfect peace, she went to the church of St. Damiano[2] by the

[1] The convent of Sant' Angelo Michaele was situated to the south of Assisi under the shadow of Monte Subasio, and was about a mile from the city. The convent has long since been destroyed; only a few remains now mark the site. In 1238 the nuns of Sant' Angelo had already adopted the rule of the Poor Clares in a mitigated form, as is evident from a Bull of Gregory IX. of December 17th of that year. (*Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 258.) Whilst St. Clare was at Sant' Angelo she was joined by her younger sister Agnes. The story of the attempt of their relatives to take Agnes by force back to her home, and how Clare by her prayers saved her sister, is told in the Chronicle of the XXIV. Generals, vide *Anal. Franc.*, iii. pp. 174–75, and in the present legend, *infra*, p. 69.

[2] The church and convent of San Damiano stand about a mile from the city to the south-east. It still exists almost as it

counsel of Master Saint Francis. And her mind was possessed with the thought that never for anything she had had, nor for any other thing, would she remove from this place. And it was this church that St. Francis wished so much to repair that he gave to the priest his money to do it. Here he was praying once to Our Saviour when from a cross there came a voice which said to him : "Francis, repair My house which is thus destroyed, as thou seest."[1] In this little house which seemed like a cloister the Lady Saint Clare enclosed herself. And for her the tempest of the world ceased, and she secluded her body as long as she lived. She may be called a silver dove, for thus does the dove make her nest and her walls, and thus did she build herself in with other such little ones, there where she brought forth to God a great company of virgins. And

was in the time of St. Clare. The refectory and choir used by the saint are preserved in their original simplicity, with the furniture with which she furnished them. In fact, San Damiano is an almost unspoiled, primitive Franciscan settlement. It was confiscated by the Italian Government in 1866, but was purchased by the late Marquis of Ripon in 1881 and restored to the use of the Friars Minor, in whose care it had been since the Poor Clares removed into the city shortly after St. Clare's death.

[1] *Cf.* 1 Celano, viii. 18; 2 Celano, vi. 10; *Tres. Soc.*, v. 13; *Leg. Maj.*, ii. 1.



ST. CLARE'S HAIR IS CUT OFF BY ST. FRANCIS, AND SHE IS RECEIVED INTO THE ORDER

she established her monastery and there founded her order of Poor Ladies in the way of penitence. Her first aim was that those who came after her should know her path and her footsteps. In this narrow cloister she lived in great austerity and great discipline for the space of forty years. And she mortified here the beauty of her body. She was all full of virtues, and Holy Church was filled with the odour of her good life. Well may we say she lived gloriously who sees how many souls she gained to Our Lord.

How her good Fame was spread abroad.

And behold soon the fame of her saintliness was in all the earth, so that from all parts women ran to smell the sweet odour of her life. Virgins, by her example, kept their virginity, and the married held themselves more chastely. High dames and nobles left their possessions and their great palaces and enclosed themselves in little cloisters and narrow places. And it seemed to them great joy and glory to live in great bitterness of flesh for the love of Our Lord. And by the example of this virgin they resisted the temptations of the flesh. And many who were married vowed to

live in chastity. And the men entered religion, and the women too. The mother counselled the daughter to serve God, and the daughter the mother, the sister the brother, and the brother the sister; all desired to serve Jesus Christ with a fervent love,[1] and longed to be of the companions of this virgin Clare in this holy life, for they seemed like angels on this earth. Many virgins who had news of this Clare, and who could not enter religion, vowed themselves religiously in the houses of their fathers.[2] Thus Clare by her example brought forth so many good children to Our Lord that it seemed that the prophecy was spoken of her which says that the woman who has no husband has more children than she who is married.

How the Fame of her Goodness was far spread.

That the heavenly harvest, led by the grace of God, which was shown in her and was begun in the valley of Spoleto, might not be enclosed in a narrow space, Our Lord, by His divine providence, made this joy to grow to such a great river of grace that one may well say the sound and the

[1] See a similar passage in *Tres. Soc.*, xiv. 60.
[2] *Cf.* Introduction, p. 19.



MANY NOBLE LADIES ARE RECEIVED INTO HER ORDER BY ST. CLARE

noise of it resounded in the whole city of Holy Church. The news of this great thing was spread through the world into far countries, and had begun to gain many souls to Jesus Christ. Although Clare was enclosed in her seclusion the light and clearness of her intention shone clearly in the houses and palaces and the chambers of duchesses; countesses and queens were full of the good renown of her virtue; and good ladies of high lineage humbled themselves to follow the holiness of this maiden.[1] Many noble maidens, and even some who were worthy to marry kings and dukes, through the great renown of Clare and her example learnt to do bitter penance. And those who were already married followed to the best of their power. Many monasteries were founded in many cities of this Order which Clare began thus as a work of God. And chastity was much multiplied in that age through St. Clare. And virginity, which had much declined, was by her restored to great honour. By these blessed flowers which Clare brought forth to Holy Church, lovingly blooming and adorned with blossom, she

[1] Quite a number of royal ladies became Poor Clares during the saint's lifetime; amongst them were Blessed Agnes, daughter of the King of Bohemia; Blessed Cunigunde, Queen of Boleslaus the Chaste of Poland, her sister Yolande, and her sister-in-law the Blessed Salomea.

herself wished to be surrounded when she said: "Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples, because I languish with love."[1] Now let us continue and see what was her way of life.

Of the holy Humility that was in her.

This Clare was the noble founder and the first stone of her order. From the first she strove to build the foundations upon holy humiliation and to set it upon all virtue. She promised to Master St. Francis all holy obedience, and this obedience she truly ever upheld. She left through humility the office of Abbess three years after she was converted, for she loved more to be in obedience to another than that others should be in obedience to her, and to be amongst the handmaids of Jesus Christ than to be served.[2] But St. Francis took her back and constrained her that she should resume the office and govern the Poor Ladies, and of this she had greater fear than joy in her heart, and it seemed to her to be more slavery

[1] Canticum Canticorum, ii. 5.

[2] It is generally supposed that the title of Abbess was not assumed by St. Clare until three years after her religious consecration; and that the taking of this title marks the first stage in the development of the Order of the Poor Ladies as an enclosed order of nuns. See Introduction, p. 20.

than freedom. And the more that prelacy seemed a great thing, the less did she assume it, and it seemed to her a thing vile. And she was always found the best apparelled for serving and had the roughest habit. She refused no office, nor service belonging to woman, and thus she gave to her sisters water for the washing of their hands. She was on her feet when the others sat, and served when the others ate. Gladly she did all things that she should do, for she loved better to work herself than to command her sisters. Her heart and her spirit were so strong and noble that she washed the sick in the infirmary; she rejected, forwent, no ordeal, nor had she any unwillingness nor any fear. When women[1] came from without she washed their feet and kissed them. Once she was washing the feet of a lay sister who served them, and when she wished to kiss them

[1] *i.e.* The lay-sisters who did the business of the community outside the convent. Benedict XII., however, forbade the professed sisters to go abroad outside the enclosure. To meet the difficulty thus created, when the sisters required business to be done outside its enclosure, the custom arose of having pious women attached to the convent, who did not profess the Rule or take the religious vows. Afterwards "Extern sisters" were instituted. These are sisters who take the vows of religion, but are professed not according to the Rule of St. Clare, but according to the Rule of the Third Order Regular. Cf. *Seraphicæ Legislationis Textus Originales* (Quaracchi), pp. 127–28.

the sister would not suffer that the virgin who was her Abbess should kiss her foot, and, drawing it back, struck the saint upon the mouth. And what did the holy Lady Clare? She took the foot very gently of this sister and pressed a kiss upon the sole of the foot.

How she loved holy Poverty.

In the beginning of her conversion she sold all her heritage and gave all to the poor, without keeping anything back,[1] for she was a vessel full of holy purity, and was true and pure of spirit, and had true humility. Therefore when she had disburdened herself of earthly things she ran more lightly after Jesus Christ. And therefore she had a great love and so great friendship for true poverty, that she wished for nothing except Jesus Christ, and would not suffer that the sisters should have any possessions. For it seemed not to her that they could enjoy the treasures and precious stones of Paradise for which they had sold and given all they had if they kept back

[1] It was the rule of St. Francis that those who joined his fraternity should if possible distribute any goods they possessed to the poor. They were not to leave their goods to their relatives, unless these were in need. Vide Rule of 1223, cap. ii.; Rule of St. Clare, cap. ii.; *Cf.* 2 Celano, ii. 49.



ST. CLARE WASHES THE FEET OF HER SISTERS WITH HOLY HUMILITY

these temporalities in which there be naught but remorse of conscience. Often she admonished her sisters to perseverance, saying, "The congregation and the company of religion is pleasant to our Lord when there is great fashion of poverty. It is firm and stable and enduring when it lives in distress of body and great poverty." She admonished often her sisters who had too fair habitations, that they should conform to the poverty of Jesus Christ, whom His poor Mother put to lie in a manger when He was born. The remembrance of this poverty pleased her so greatly that she had made of it a clasp of gold, with which she had closed her heart in her breast so that no earthly thing could mingle with her love. And when she wished to put a name to her religion she prayed Pope Innocent III. that her religion be called after poverty. Of which the Pope had great joy when he heard the great fervour of this virgin, and said that never had he heard such boon or privilege asked at the Court of Rome. And because of the great joy that he had at this petition that he was not accustomed to hear, himself made the first note of the privilege with his own hand.[1] The Apostle

[1] There has been much controversy over this passage in the legend. (Vide Introduction, p. 20.)

Gregory, who was great in estate and in life, loved this Clare as the father doth his child.[1] And for this he prayed her, with graciousness, to consent to certain possessions, which he himself offered her, against the perilous times that were to come. But her heart was so strong that in no manner would she consent neither to take nor to have anything. And when the apostle said to her that if she repented of her vow he would absolve her from it, she replied that at no time and on no day did she desire absolution from the poverty of Jesus Christ. She had marvellous great joy when the brothers who begged their bread brought her the scraps and the crumbs which remained to them,[2] and was vexed when they brought her whole meats. And what more can I tell you of her? She strove all she could to conform to Jesus, the

[1] *i.e.* Pope Gregory IX. The curious phrase of the French legend, "L'Apostole Grégoire," recalls a passage in the *Speculum Perfectionis*, where St. Francis, addressing Cardinal Ugolino, the future Gregory IX., says: "Vos qui estis Dominus et *Apostolicus* noster," &c. (Vide *Spec. Perf.*, ed. Sabatier, cap. xxiii., ed. Lemmens, No. 2.)

[2] The friars were accustomed to do the questing for the sisters at San Damiano. According to Celano, St. Francis had promised St. Clare that he and his brethren should always give them help and counsel, and that discreet brethren should be appointed to their service both during his life and after his death. *Cf.* 2 Celano, ii. 155. See also the declaration of St. Francis in the Rule of St. Clare, cap. vi., in *Seraph. Leg. Text.*, p. 62.



ST. CLARE MULTIPLIES THE BREAD IN THE CONVENT OF SAN DAMIANO

poor crucified, in very perfect poverty, like one who would not that any of the things of here below should distract her from her friend, nor prevent her from running after Our Lord. A wonderful thing was this true love of poverty.

The Miracle of the Bread that was multiplied by her.

One day it happened that at the time and hour of eating there was only one single piece of bread in her convent. The holy lady called the dispenser and bade her part the Bread of God[1] and sent one portion to the brothers and the other kept for the sisters. And the holy lady commanded that they should make the portions according to the number of the sisters, and at this poor table they should give to each her portion. Then answered the devout daughter, the poor dispenser, that it would be expedient that God should renew His miracles before she could make so many portions of so little bread. And the holy lady said to the good woman, "Do, daughter, only as I bid you." And the good dispenser hastened to obey and to do the bidding

[1] In Testament of St. Francis, "Bread of the Lord" = begged bread.

of her good mother. Then the gentle mother ran to Jesus Christ and prayed Him with sweet sighs for these daughters, that this little quantity of bread should increase in the hands of the dispenser who divided it. And it was multiplied in such manner that all the ladies ate of it in plenty.[1]

The Miracle of the Oil that was found in the Jars.

Another day it happened that the handmaids of Our Lord had not oil enough wherewith to dress a little meat for the sick. Then the good virgin Saint Clare, the mistress of humility, took a jar and washed it well with her own hands and put it outside the house, so that the brothers who begged the alms should take it from there. Then she prayed the brother who procured the alms that he should ask for a little oil. And the good, faithful brother ran to take the jar and hastened to succour the great endurance of the poor ladies. But before he came, Our Lord by His sweet mercy and by the prayer of Saint Clare, filled the jar of oil for the consolation of the poor

[1] This miracle of the multiplication of the bread, and the miracle of the oil related in the following chapter, are mentioned in the Bull of Canonisation.

ladies. And when the brother found the jar full he thought that they mocked him, and said thus, murmuring against them, "These women laugh at me, who call me to go and beg for oil for them and their jar is all full.

The Torments that she wrought upon her Flesh.

It were better, peradventure, that I should hold my peace than that I should speak of the marvellous torment with which she made her tender flesh to suffer, and how those who know the truth are all amazed. It is not a marvel that she was clothed only by one poor habit and one mantle only, which served more to cover her than to warm her. It was not marvel that she went ever barefoot, and it was not marvel that she fasted at all times. For since she had in her cloister some who did these things we do not praise her for them. But we give her praise specially for that she robed her poor flesh with pig's skin sewn to be more hard. And she wore this secretly underneath her habit, the hair towards her poor virgin flesh. And she wore always a hard shirt of horsehair, drawn into great knots and tied round her body with rough cords on one side and another. One of the daughters

tried this vesture and put it on, but she found it so bitter and full of anguish that she could in no wise suffer it. And so, having borrowed it, she hastily returned it, and endured it only three days. The holy virgin lay on the bare earth at one time, and covered herself only with vine branches, and instead of a pillow she had a hard piece of wood under her head. But when she had led this life for a long time her body was enfeebled, and she relaxed her vows and had a poor piece of sackcloth and put a little straw under her head. And when she had thus used her body through penitence she was full sick. Then Master St. Francis commanded her that she should lie on a sack full of straw or hay. She used such abstinence in her fasts that nobody could have lived with them if the virtue of God had not sustained it. When she was well and cured she fasted for the Lent of St. Martin, and the great Lent,[1] with bread and water, save the Sundays, when she tasted a little wine, if she had any. And thus, O you who hear it, the sufferings of the heart were assuaged by the pains of the body. The love of the heart assuages the pain of body.[2]

[1] *i.e.* the Lent before Easter.

[2] The Bollandist legend here adds that for a long time St. Clare took no food whatever on Mondays, Wednesdays, and

Of her holy Prayer.

As this virgin was mortified and estranged in flesh, so was she estranged from the world. She was ever in holy prayer and holy meditations, and employed all her time in praising God. After Compline she was with her sisters and melted in tears, by which the others were amazed and moved to pity; and when the others, full wearied, went to repose themselves in their hard beds, she watched thus ever at night and was never weary of praying to God, and when the others slept, then she felt the sweet feeling of God's presence, and it often happened that she stretched herself upon the earth and wept so tenderly that it seemed as though she wept on the feet of Jesus Christ, and that she held Him in her arms and kissed His feet. One night it happened that the devil appeared to her in the semblance of a black child and said to her:

Fridays, during these two Lents, until, on account of her ill-health, St. Francis and the Bishop of Assisi commanded her to take every day at least an ounce and a half of bread. It also adds that, notwithstanding these austerities, St. Clare always kept a pleasant and cheerful countenance: "The interior joy which filled her soul manifested itself outwardly in her body; for when love has taken entire possession of the heart, the sufferings of the body count for nothing." Cf. *De Conformit.* in *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 354.

"Weep not so, lest thou lose thine eyes." And she answered him: "He who will see God will not be blind," and immediately the enemy departed all confused. And that same night after matins St. Clare was in prayer, all bathed in tears, when there came to her the wicked tempter and said to her: "Weep no more, lest thy brain should fall and thou shouldst blow it through thy nose, for thy nose would be twisted; . . ." and immediately he vanished. Such signs showed well that God renewed her in the furnace of fervent prayer and of His goodness made her feel the good savour of His goodness. For when she left her prayers she came forth from them so joyously and spoke to her sisters words so glowing that she warmed their hearts with the fire of the love of God. They marvelled greatly, for it seemed to them that from the mouth of St. Clare issued a sweetness and that her countenance was more beautiful and more bright after her prayer than before. Truly God, who is the true light, valued this good lover of poverty, and with sweetness filled her heart and mind in prayer, so that its proof was shewn outwardly. Thus was she united firmly to her Spouse, Jesus Christ, and thus she delighted in communion with Him and with the things above.

And thus was she strong and virtuous and stable in the path of the fortunes of this world, and she enclosed in her earthly vessel the high treasure of Paradise; and her body and her flesh were lowly in humbleness as her heart was high in Paradise. It was her custom to arise at matins before the others and to awake the other young sisters and move them to go to God. And when the sisters slept, she went to light the lamp and to ring the bell with her own hands. And at no time or season was she ever idle, nor was she ever lukewarm in her cloister, nor with any sister, for the good lady inflamed them to such good deeds by her words and by her example that they were so strenuous that no sloth could enter. All their time was given to serving God and to praise and prayer.

Some Miracles of her Prayers, and first concerning the Saracens who were put to flight.

Now it is right and reasonable we should tell you of the number of great marvels which God did through her and by the prayers of the Lady St. Clare, who was true and loyal and worthy of

great honours. That tempest which was at the time of Frederick the Emperor, by which the Church was in such torment that she had much to suffer in diverse parts of the world, was more heavy in the land of Spoleto than in any other part. And by the command of the Emperor there were established armies and a great company of Christians, Saracens, and archers, like a swarm of flies to destroy many people, and with them castles and cities. The people ran as though mad to the gates of Assisi, and soon the Saracens, full of cruelty and all malice, sought nothing but to shed the blood of the Christians. They came even to the cloisters of the holy Poor Ladies of St. Damiano. The holy ladies were in such great fear that their hearts trembled within them, and they ran lamenting to their holy mother. And she, who was sick, caused herself to be taken to the gates and set before the enemy. And she made them bring before her the body of Our Lord, which was in a monstrance devoutly set and kept.[1] And this holy lady came before Him in

[1] The alabaster monstrance in which the Sacred Host was carried on this occasion is still kept in the Church of San Damiano. St. Clare is frequently represented in paintings herself holding the monstrance, but the legend distinctly says it was carried before her, and that she lay prostrate before the Host.



ST. CLARE PRAYS BEFORE THE BLESSED SACRAMENT, AND THE SARACENS ARE DRIVEN FROM BEFORE THE WALLS OF ASSISI

prayer and said to Him with tears: "Ah, sweet Lord God, doth it please Thee that these who serve Thee and who have given themselves to Thee, whom I keep for the love of Thee, should fall into the hands of the heathen? O sweet Jesus, I pray thee succour Thy handmaids, for I cannot in this moment succour them." And Our Lord, by a new and special grace, sent her a voice like the voice of a child which said: "I will keep you always." "Ah, sweet Lord God," said she, "keep this city, for it gives us our living for the love of Thee." And Our Lord answered: "The city will take no harm, but always I will defend it." And when she rose from her prayer, the saint wept and comforted her daughters full sweetly and said to them: "I command you, sweet sisters, that you be comforted and have true faith and true hope in God, for the Saracens will do you no harm." And the Saracens were so much afraid that they fled hastily outside the walls inside which they had entered, and were thus routed by the virtue of the prayer of the virgin Clare. Then she commanded to all those that had heard the voice of which I have told you that they should tell it to no man nor woman in any manner so long as she lived.

How she delivered the City of Assisi from the Saracens.

Another time it happened that from Aversa[1] there came another man, full of vain glory, who was very hardy in battle and was captain of a great host which Frederick the Emperor had given him. This man led his host to take the city of Assisi. He cut down the trees and devastated the country round and assailed the city, and swore and said that never would he depart until he should have taken it, and until it came to pass that the city was lost. And when St. Clare heard the news she was full of great pity, and called her sisters and said to them: "My sweet sisters, we get great good from this city every day; it would be great ill-will in us if we did not succour the town in its need, in such manner as we may." And then she commanded they should bring ashes, and bade her sisters bare their heads, and she put the ashes first on her bare breast and then on the heads of the others, and said to them: "Now, sweet sisters, go and pray God with all your hearts that

[1] Vitalis d'Aversa, one of the freebooting captains employed by Frederick II.



A SECOND TIME THE SARACENS ARE ROUTED BY THE PRAYERS OF ST. CLARE AND HER SISTERS

(*By* ANDREAS COLLAERT)

it may please Him to deliver the city from its enemies." And how should I recount to you each thing by itself, either the weeping, or the tears, or the long prayers that the virgins made to God? For Our Lord heard them, and the next day He put such great fear in the perverse hearts of the Saracens that they fled and left the city. And the proud captain, contrary to his oath, departed from the country. And he stayed not till he was out of it[1] (p. 67. June 22, 1244).

How the Virtue of her Prayer converted Agnes, her Sister.[2]

It would not be right or reasonable if we did not tell of the marvellous virtue of her prayer. How at the beginning of her conversion she conceived a soul for God, and how she guaranteed

[1] According to Ant. Christofani (*Delle Storie di Assisi*, ed. 1902, p. 107) the flight of Vitalis d'Aversa took place in the dawn of June 22, 1244.

[2] Vide *supra*, p. 47, note 1. Agnes was not the only relative who joined Clare at San Damiano. Wadding in his list of the community in the year 1238 mentions another sister, Beatrice, and two nieces, Amata and Balbina. This latter died Abbess of Val' di Gloria, near Spello. Ortolana, Clare's mother, also joined the Poor Ladies after her husband's death. *Cf.* Wadding, *Annales*, ad an. 1238; Chron. XXIV. Gen. in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 182; De Conformit. in *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 357.

it when she had converted it. For she had a sister younger than herself, whom she wished firmly should be converted, and in all the prayers she made she prayed first with all her heart and with all her strength to Our Lord, that as in the world they had been of one mind, He would convert her, that they might serve God together with one accord. Sweetly St. Clare prayed the Father of Mercy that Agnes, her sister, whom she had left at the house of her father, should hate to remain in the world and that she should taste the sweetness of God, so that she should have heart for nothing but God only in such manner that in company one with another they should remain together and give their virginity to the King of glory. Marvellously these two sisters[1] loved each other, and they were very sorrowful, and the one more than the other, at their separation. But Our Lord granted very quickly to this noble suppliant the first gift that she asked, for it was what pleased Him much. After the seventh[2] day of St. Clare's conversion came Agnes, her sister, to her and discovered to her her secret, for she said quite openly that she desired God.

[1] See the letter written by Agnes to St. Clare in *Anal. Franc.*, iii.

[2] The Bolandist legend says *sixteen* days; and the Chronicle of the XXIV. Generals, *fifteen*. Cf. *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 174.

And when she heard it she embraced her with joy and said: "My sweet sister, I give thanks to God, who has heard me for thee, for whom I had much trouble. I know that this thy conversion is marvellous."

How St. Clare defended her Sister by her Prayers.

In these days the sweet sisters were at St. Michael[1] in Panso together, they who were united to God and followed the footsteps and the way of Jesus Christ. There was St. Clare, who had more of the savour of God than all the others, and she introduced her sweet sister, newly made novice. Then the kinsmen of the sweet sisters arose and began a new battle against the holy virgins when they heard tell that Agnes was gone to live with Clare her sister. Then went they all furious to the place where the good maidens were, twelve of their nearest kin. But they did not show outwardly the malice that they had within their hearts, and they gave to understand that they came for peace. And when they came within they did not use force

[1] *i.e.* Sant' Angelo in Panso.

with St. Clare, for they knew well they would gain nothing, so they turned to Agnes and said to her: "What doest thou? Return at once with us to thy home." And she answered them that never would she depart from the company of St. Clare, her sister. And then an outrageous man took her by her hair and began to drag her without. And the others took her by the arms and lifted her and thus carried her off. And she, to whom it seemed as though she were in the hands of wolves and snatched out of the hand of God, began to cry and to say: "Ah, sweet sister, help me. Suffer not that I be torn from the company of Jesus Christ." But the traitors dragged the maiden in spite of her into the mountains and tore off her hair and her coat. And sweet Clare set herself to prayer and prayed Our Lord that He would give her sister a strong and courageous heart, and that she might, by the power of God, conquer and surmount the force of these people. And the Holy Spirit made her to weigh so heavy that it seemed as though her body was fastened to the earth, nor, by any means, could they move her. And the men who were in the fields and among the vines came to help them, but they could not lift her from the ground. And when they could go no farther,

there was one of them who said in jest: "It is no marvel if she be heavy, for she hath eaten all the night of lead." Then one of her kin lifted his hand to strike her cruelly, but suddenly a great pain seized him and it endured for a long time afterwards. After Agnes had suffered this, St. Clare came swiftly and prayed those who were there that they would depart, and for God's sake to leave this battle, and that they would suffer her to care for her sister Agnes, who lay all disarrayed upon the ground. So they departed with great distress of mind. And the gentle Agnes arose right gladly and went with her dear and much-loved sister, taking great joy in this first battle that she had endured for Jesus Christ. And from then onward she set herself to serve God perfectly. And St. Francis presented her for the service of God, both her and her sister Clare. And because in a few words we cannot recount the perfection of the sweet Agnes, let us tell more of the life of St. Clare.

How she drove the Devil out of the Body of a Woman.

It was no marvel that the prayers of St. Clare were strong and valiant against the malice of men,

if they were so valiant and powerful as to turn devils. For there was once a devout woman at the Bishop's house who came to the place of the Ladies to give thanks to God and to St. Clare, for she had been delivered by the merits of St. Clare, and when the devils fled, they said that the prayers of St. Clare burnt them, and because of them they could not remain in that place. Gregory the Pope had great faith in, and great devotion to, these prayers, and it was not without reason, for he had felt and proved the virtue that was in St. Clare. When he was in any need or great necessity, when he was Pope, he sent at once his letters to St. Clare and requested her to pray for him.[1] And at once he felt comforted and consoled. Thus the Vicar of Christ in his humility had such devotion to this St. Clare that he recommended himself to and requested the help of her prayers. Truly we should follow the devotion of such a man, for he knew the power of love, and how virgins have free entry through the gate of the heart of Our Lord. And if the King of Heaven gives Himself to those who love Him faithfully, who would

[1] Two letters of Gregory IX. to St. Clare are extant—one written while he was still cardinal, the other after his elevation to the supreme pontificate. (Cf. *Chron.* xiv. *Gen.* in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 183; Sbaralea, *Bull. Franc.*, i. p. 37.)



ST. CLARE WITH MONSTRANCE

(*By* Israbel van Mechfnen, 1490. *From an engraving in the British Museum*)

he be who could refuse his love to those who pray devoutly for his needs?

Of the Devotion that she had to the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

The deeds of this virgin prove and show the great faith that she had in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. For she had a great sickness which struck her down to her bed, and she made them lift her from her bed and support her on one side and another. And she spun a fine linen of which she made several corporals,[1] and she sent them to several places and to diverse churches of the city of Assisi, wrapped in a good cloth of silk.[2] And when she was to receive the Body of Our Saviour it was marvel the hot tears that she wept. She was all bedewed with them, and she had such great fear when she approached her Saviour, for she doubted not that she received Him who governed heaven and earth.

[1] An alb worked by St. Clare is preserved in "Santa Chiara," Assisi.

[2] Similarly of St. Francis it is related that at one time he determined to send the brethren abroad with pyxes to distribute to poor churches where the Blessed Sacrament was not meetly kept. *Cf.* 2 Celano, ii. 152. Bartholomew of Pisa says St. Clare distributed these corporals "*per fratres*," through the brothers. Vide *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 355.

Of the Consolation that God gave her in her Sickness.

Thus as she had remembrance of Jesus Christ in her sickness, so God comforted her in her infirmity and languor. At the time of the Nativity, when angels and men make festival and rejoice in the little Jesus who is born, all the ladies went to the church and left their holy mother all alone, weighed down with sickness. And then she began to think of the little Jesus, and was sorrowful that she could not be at the service of Our Saviour, and said sighing : "Good Lord God, I am left here all alone with Thee ;" and she began to hear the brothers who were singing at the church of St. Francis, and she heard the jubilation of the psalmody and other things like the antiphons, the responses, and the Holy Mass. And it seemed to her a great melody like the sound of organs. And yet the place was not close enough for the ear of man to hear it, unless God had made him hear by His grace.[1] And when in the morning they came

[1] The Latin legend adds : "She was even permitted to see the crib and the Holy Infant lying in a manger." It will be remembered that St. Francis made a crib one Christmas in the wood near his hermitage at Greccio (1 Celano, xxx.). It would

to her, she said to them: "Blessed be Our Lord Jesus Christ, for when you left me He left me not. In truth I tell you that I have heard to-night, by the grace of God, nigh all the service and solemnity which has been said in the church of St. Francis."

Of the great Love she had to the Crucifix.

The pain of the death of Our Lord was ever in her mind, for she thought of the holy wounds of Our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ with bitterness in her heart, and her will and her thoughts were full of sadness and anguish. Marvellous often was she inebriated with the tears which she shed for the love of Jesus Christ. The great love for God which she had taken into her heart showed often in signs outwardly. She taught and exhorted the novices to mourn for the Passion of Our Blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. And what she spoke with her mouth she did in heart and deed, for

seem the Friars Minor continued this custom in their churches; from these the custom afterwards spread to other churches till it became universally established. See the recital of this incident in *Fioretti*, xxxiv., and in the *Actus S. Franc.*, cap. xlii., where it is said that St. Clare also received Holy Communion in the church of St. Francis.

she gave them the example. When she was in strict privacy, before she could speak she was all burnt and bedewed with tears. It was her custom to be more devout and more fervent between midday and None than at any other hour, and she made herself learn the Office of the Cross[1] so as to say it with all her will and strength at that hour when Jesus Christ was crucified and sacrificed on the Altar of the Cross. And she girdled herself with a little cord on which there were thirteen large knots and many little knots and rings. And this she did in remembrance of the wounds of Jesus Christ.

Of her Remembrance of the Death and Passion of Our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Once it happened on the holy day of the Last Supper, when we commemorate how God loved to the last His disciples, recommending for all the hour of His Passion to His Father. Then St. Clare, weary and sad, shut herself into her cell, and she prayed long to God and was sad even

[1] The Latin legend says: "The Office of the Cross which that lover of the Cross, the Blessed Francis, had composed." The text of this office is given in *Opuscula S. P. Francisci* (Quaracchi, 1904), pp. 126–48. Cf. *The Writings of St. Francis*, by Fr. Paschal Robinson, O.F.M., p. 154 *seq.*

unto death. And in this sadness she was oppressed with a fervent love, full of desire, for she remembered how Jesus Christ was taken at this hour and ill-treated and mocked, and with this thought she was all inebriated. And the next day she was in such ecstasy that she knew not where her body was. Her eyes in her head gazed into one place without blinking or moving. And the eyes of her heart were fixed on Jesus Christ so that she saw not the things of the earth. One of her daughters, more intimate and known to her than the others, went often to see her, and always she found her in the same place. On the night of Saturday the devout daughter brought her a lighted candle. And without speaking she signed to St. Clare to remember the command of St. Francis, for he had commanded her that she should pass no day without eating something. Thus, when she came before her with her candle, Clare came to herself again, and it seemed as though she came back from another world, and she said: "Sweet sister, what need is there of a candle? Is it not still day?" "Dear mother," she answered, "the night is gone, and the day is passed and another night has returned." "Sweet sister," said the Mother, "may this sleep that I have

taken be blessed, for I desired it much and God gave it to me. But take heed that you tell no one whilst I live."

The Marvels that she wrought by the Sign of the Cross.

When Our Lord Jesus Christ knew and perceived how much she loved Him, and the great burning love that she had for the Holy Cross for the love of Him, He illuminated her, and gave her such privilege that she had power to perform signs and miracles by the cross, for when she made the sign of the true cross over the sick, immediately their sickness left them. And many miracles were done by her of which I will tell.

First of a Brother who was out of his Mind.

One day it happened that St. Francis sent to St. Clare a brother who was named Stefeno and was possessed. And he sent him to her that she might make the sign of the cross over him, for he knew well that she was a woman of great perfection, and he honoured her greatly for the great perfection that was in her. And she, who was a



ST. CLARE HEALS THE SICK WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

good and obedient daughter, made the sign over the brother at the command of St. Francis.[1] And she made him sleep a little in the place where she was accustomed to pray to God. And after he had slept a little he arose sane and cured and returned to St. Francis, delivered from his sickness.

Another Miracle.

A child of three years called Mattiolo, born in the city of Spoleto, had fixed a stone in his nostril in such manner that no man could extract it. And he was dying in anguish, so that they took him to St. Francis. And when he saw him he sent him to St. Clare. As soon as she had made the sign of the cross he threw out the stone to the ground and was cured.

Another Miracle worked upon a Sister.

Another virgin of the company of the sisters, who was called Amata,[2] was ill of dropsy, and

[1] Cf. *Fioretti*, xxxiii., where it is said St. Francis was wont to send the sick to St. Clare, that she might heal them with the sign of the cross.

[2] Amata was a niece of St. Clare. Wadding mentions her as a member of the community of San Damiano in 1238 (cf. *Annales*, i. ad an. 1238).

had been much afflicted for the space of three months. And she had these fevers ever and so great a pain she had in her side that she must lie always in her bed. And the good Clare, who was very pitiful, had great pity on her. And she made the sign of the true cross, and so soon as the cross was made, all her sickness left her. And she remained sound and cured.

Another Miracle worked on a Sister.

Another of these handmaidens of Jesus Christ, who was born in poverty, had for two years lost her voice so entirely that hardly could they hear her speak. So that one night, on the Feast of Our Lady, it was shown to her that St. Clare would cure her. And when she heard this said she waited with great joy for the daylight. When it was day she went very early to the holy virgin Clare and besought her, with great devotion, that she would make the sign of the holy cross. And when the sign was made she recovered her voice and sang well and sweetly.[1]

[1] In the Bollandist legend two other miracles are here recorded; in the first it is related how a boy from Perugia, who was suffering from a sore eye, was brought to St. Clare, and she, after signing him with the sign of the cross, sent him to her mother, Ortolana, who was then at San Damiano, that she also might sign him with the cross.



ST. CLARE CURES THE BROTHER NAMED STEPHEN WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Another Miracle on one of the Sisters.

Another sister, who was called Christina,[1] had been for a long space deaf of one ear. And she had taken all the advice she could, and could never cure it by medicine or physic, but so soon as St. Clare had made the sign of the cross on her head and had touched her ears, she heard full clearly.

Another Miracle.

In one cloister where St. Clare dwelt there were many sisters very sick of great fevers and diverse maladies. It happened one day that Clare went where those lay who were sick, and as she was wont she took with her some good medicine which she knew how to use. And she made over the sick the sign of the cross. And immediately six of the sisters were cured of their sickness. And by this we see how the tree of the true cross was deeply planted in the heart of this holy virgin, and how she cherished the beloved fruit and leaves—that is to say, that by the sign of the cross that she made the sick were cured of their maladies.

[1] Also mentioned by Wadding, *ut supra.*

How she taught her Sisters.

A good and faithful mistress was St. Clare to teach young people who knew little of religion. She was the Provost of the maidens of Our Lord. She taught and instructed how to do penance. She showed them first how to fly the voice of the world, so that they should love nothing, neither country, nor houses, nor lands, nor to have strength in anything that could displease God. And she counselled them that they should hate to do the will of their flesh and the delights of the body which were against their good heart and good reason, and showed them how they should walk circumspectly amongst good men; and in order to gain souls for God, she wished them to work and labour with their own hands, at such tasks as she had appointed; and afterwards she wished them, from bodily work, to set themselves to prayer.[1] And thus she wished that in praying God they should warm their hearts and leave illness and coldness of heart and be illumined by the fire of the love of God, and that instead of lukewarmness they should have burning devotion. In no cloister could silence be better kept nor all rules better

[1] Vide Introduction, p. 13.

observed. And their words had neither lightness nor malice; thus were they so good and peaceable that they showed how in their hearts they had enough possessions. The good mistress herself spoke so little and she restrained her speech in such wise that she spoke only that which in her heart and her thought came forth from chastity and charity.

How she heard willingly and devoutly the Words of Jesus Christ.

The good lady provided for her daughters the nourishment of the word of God through devout preachers. And know that she took her part in these no less than they, for within her heart was founded such joy and delight that these words of holy preaching pleased her much. And so much it delighted her to hear speech of God that once, when Brother Filipo di Adria was preaching very ardently, a beautiful child appeared before St. Clare and was there a long time and had marvellous cognisance of St. Clare. And it came to pass that he who was worthy to see this child that was before St. Clare received such great joy that none could tell it. Although she was not lettered, she more readily heard sermons in Latin

than in the Romance tongue.[1] The shell knew well that within the nut was the good kernel. She listened attentively to the sermons and meditated on them sweetly.[2] Well she knew how to draw from a sermon that which was profitable to her soul. She knew well that it was less easy to gather sweet flowers on bitter thorns than to eat good fruit from a good tree—that is to say, for a rough sermon to be very edifying than a polished one little profitable. Once it happened that the Pope Gregory forbade that any brother should go into the house of the

[1] Speech of the people of the time.

[2] There is an incident related in the Chronicle of the XXIV. Generals (*Anal. Franc.*, iii. p. 81), and in Bartholomew of Pisa (*Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 208). An English friar, a doctor in theology, was preaching at San Damiano before St. Clare and Brother Giles. When the preacher had proceeded some way with his discourse, Brother Giles, perhaps wishing to test the preacher's humility, cried out: "Be silent, master, be silent; I wish to preach." Whereupon the preacher at once broke off his discourse. When Giles had spoken a few burning words, he said to the preacher: "Now, brother, finish the sermon thou did'st begin;" and the preacher did so. At this, St. Clare, greatly delighted, exclaimed: "To-day is fulfilled the desire of our holy father Francis, which he sometimes expressed to me, saying: 'Much do I wish that my brethren who are clerics should arrive at such humility that a master in theology will cease preaching at the voice of a lay brother wishing to preach.' I tell you, my brothers," added St. Clare, "that I have been more edified by this master than if I had seen him raise the dead to life."

ladies without his permission, and for this the good mother, St. Clare, had great grief in her heart, for she saw that she would have less than her need of the nourishment of Holy Scripture. She said to her sisters: "From henceforth Pope Gregory may well take all our brothers away when he takes away those who nourish our souls with the word of God." And immediately she sent all the brothers of her house away to the minister,[1] and said she would have nought to do with the brothers who begged their bodily bread, since she must lack those who nourished her and her sisters spiritually with the word of God. But as soon as Pope Gregory heard this news he withdrew that which he had forbidden and subjected it to the will of the minister.[2]

Of her great Charity.

This holy Abbess loved not only the bodies of her daughters, but considered much how she could nourish their hearts, and how she could feed and serve them most charitably, for when it was very cold she clothed those who were feeble

[1] Probably by the minister in this place is meant the Minister-General, as also in the second reference to the minister below. The Bollandist legend has Minister-General in the second reference.

[2] See Introduction, p. 29.

and could not follow the community austerities. She wished them to temper their penance to that which they could bear well. If she saw any of them troubled with anger or any sadness or any temptation, as it sometimes happened, she called her and comforted her weeping. And sometimes she sank down at the feet of her daughters who were sad and knelt before them, so that the sweetness and gentleness which the virgins saw in their mother should lighten their pain. Thus her daughters knew her good-will towards them and gave themselves afresh to devotion and good deeds and loved their generous mother more sweetly than they did before, and kept up their good deeds and marvelled at the great goodness God had given to His spouse.[1]

Of the great Sickness with which she was seized.

When she had lived in great poverty forty years it pleased Our Lord to call her, and He

[1] In the Latin legend there follows here the account of how St. Clare dined with St. Francis at the Portiuncula, and after this the account of the visit of the Pope to St. Clare, and how at his command she blessed the bread. According to the Bollandists, both accounts are interpolations, taken direct from the *Fioretti*. These chapters will be found at the end of this book. Vide *infra*, p. 117.

sent her a great sickness and multiplied her sufferings. She had done such bitter penance that in her body and in her flesh there was no more strength, and at last she was sore sick. For as Our Lord had given her in His holy mercy good virtues and good deeds, so did He wish to prove her, that she should suffer for love of Him great pain and great torments, for in sickness virtue is made perfect in suffering. She was marvellously virtuous in her sickness, as you shall hear. Though she had languished twenty-eight years, yet she murmured not, and in holy prayer she gave always thanks to Our Lord. Now when she was heavily burdened and weighed down with sickness, and it seemed that she drew near to her end, it pleased Our Lord to spare her from death until her end might be honoured by the presence of the Apostle and the Cardinals whose spiritual daughter she was. For when the Apostle[1] and the Cardinals had tarried a long space at Lyon, Clare was so heavily weighed down that her daughters were in so great fear that it seemed to them that a sword was piercing them, or that they

[1] *i.e.* the Pope. Innocent IV. had his court at Lyons from 1244 to 1251, having been compelled to leave Italy owing to the hostility of the Emperor, Frederick II. On his return to Italy Innocent established his court at Perugia.

were pricked with thorns. But Our Lord showed a vision to one of His good and devout handmaids of the order of St. Benedict who lived at St. Paolo.[1] And it seemed to her that she and her sisters were at San Damiano before St. Clare, who was sore sick, and it seemed to her that Clare lay in a fine and very precious bed. And it appeared to her that her daughters wept sorely around her, and watched for her soul to depart from her body. And then she saw a most fair lady who stood at the head of the bed, and said to those who wept: "Sweet daughters, weep not. This lady, who will conquer all, will not die until Our Lord and His disciples come." And not long after the Pope of Rome came from his court and came to Perugia. And as soon as the Bishop of Ostia[2] heard say that she was so oppressed, he went with great haste to see the spouse of Jesus Christ, and visited her, for he was her spiritual father, and had care and solicitude for her soul, and nourished it and loved it devoutly, and he had given to her the Body of Our Lord in this illness, and the others he had comforted with words and holy speech. Therefore the good Mother prayed him sweetly

[1] San Paolo at Bastia.

[2] Cardinal Rainaldo Conti, Bishop of Ostia, was protector of the Order. He succeeded Innocent IV. in the papal chair, under the name of Alexander IV.



THE CARDINAL OF OSTIA GIVES ST. CLARE THE LAST SACRAMENTS

with tears that he would take care of her sisters and of all the others, and for the love of God to have them in mind. And above all she prayed him to grant that her privilege of poverty be confirmed by the Pope and Cardinals.[1] And he who had loved her and her Order promised her that he would do this, and he did it. And there came the Pope and Cardinals into the city of Assisi to witness the death of the holy virgin and to bring to pass the vision which had been seen about him. For the Pope is above all other men on earth under God, and best represents the person of God, for he is in His stead upon the earth. And as the disciples were joined to Our Lord, thus are the Cardinals to the Pope, to maintain Holy Church in its estate.

How Pope Innocent visited her in her Sickness, and how he blessed her.

Our Lord hastened to accomplish that which he had promised to St. Clare, to bring her to His

[1] It was undoubtedly due to the influence of Cardinal Rainaldo that St. Clare at length obtained the confirmation of her Rule of Absolute Poverty; vide Introduction, p. 31. Both as Cardinal and as Pope, Rainaldo was a true sympathiser with the Franciscans. *Cf.* Eccleston, *De adventu Min.* (ed. Little), XV.

Paradise. She desired greatly to be delivered from this mortal life and to reach the kingdom of God, like one who had loved Him with all her heart upon earth and in very great poverty. Her members were so chastised and brought so low by sickness, that her body could no longer be comforted, for it was too weak. She made it her penance in this world, for she knew well that Our Lord would give her soul a garment of imperishable health. Pope Innocent the Fourth, he and his Cardinals, came to visit and to see her, for he had well tested her holy life, better than any woman in her time. And thus he knew that it was said he should come in his own person to see and honour her. And when he was come into the house of the Ladies, he came to the bed where lay the saint and put out his hand to her to be kissed. And when she had very graciously kissed it, she prayed full devoutly that he would stretch forth his foot. And she kissed it above and beneath full humbly and devoutly, and then bowed herself full reverently and honestly. And then she begged him full piteously that he would absolve her from all her sins. And the Holy Father said to her: "Please God I have not far greater need of absolution for the sins that I have done than thou hast." And then

with great love and devotion he gave her absolution for all her sins, and gave her full generously his blessing. And when they were all gone, because she had that day received by the hand of the provincial the true Body of Jesus Christ, she lifted her hands and opened her eyes towards heaven to Our Lord and began to say to her sisters: "Praise Our Lord, sweet sisters, for to-day He has done a great good for me and has given me the greatest gift on earth. For I have this day seen my high Lord and also His Vicar."

How she replied to Agnes, her sister, who wept.

The good virgins were all round her and feared soon to be orphans, for the death of their mother pierced their hearts. And know for certain that neither for sleep, nor for thirst, nor for rest, could they take the virgins away from their mother, nor did they remember either bed or board. All their solace was in weeping and sorrow, and amongst them was Agnes, her sister, who was a virgin and very devout. She above all was anguished and shed many bitter tears and said to her sister: "Most sweet sister, depart not from me and leave me thus alone." And she replied full sweetly: "Dear sister, it is the

will of God I should part from you. Weep not, dear sister, for you will soon come after me.[1] And I tell you that before you die Our Lord will give you many consolations."

The End of her Dying and the Vision.

This good Clare made a good end, and for this the people had a most great devotion, and the cardinals and prelates came often to see her, and honoured her thus as a true saint. But I would make you hear a great marvel, for during seven days no mortal meat entered her body. And she was so strong by the will of Our Saviour that she comforted to the service of God those who came before her, and admonished them to good deeds. And when Brother Rinaldo, who was very gracious, came to visit her, and saw the great martyrdom that she suffered and the great sickness she had borne so long, he prayed and counselled her to have patience. And then she replied: "Since Master St. Francis, the servant of Jesus Christ, has shown me the path of Paradise, and I have felt and known the will of Jesus Christ and His grace by the teaching of St. Francis, know, most sweet brother, that

[1] St. Agnes died three months later, on November 16th.

nothing since can displease me, neither penance nor infirmity can trouble me." When she felt that Our Lord knocked at the door to take her soul from this world, she made request that the good people should be with her, and at the same time her daughters and the Friars, and that they should repeat holy words, especially the words of the Passion of Jesus Christ. And with the others there came Brother Juniper, who was one of the most noble minstrels [1] that God had on earth. And often he said holy and good words in his singing, and of his coming she was right joyous. And she prayed him that if he had brought some news of God that he would tell it. And he opened his mouth and began to say sweet words which were thus like glowing sparks which issued from the furnace of his glowing heart, of which the virgin was rejoiced. And she turned to her daughters and said: "Sweet daughters, I commend to you the holy poverty of Our Lord. And give thanks to God for the gifts which He has made to us." Then she blessed all those who were devoted to her and to her Order and

[1] Cf. *Speculum Perf.* (ed. Sabatier), cap. c. Francis "would that the preacher should say unto the people: We are the minstrels of the Lord. . . . For what are the servants of God but certain minstrels of His that so lift up the hearts of men and move them to spiritual gladness?"

gave her blessing to the Poor Ladies of her Order. The rest none can tell without tears. For with her were the two companions of St. Francis, of whom one was called Brother Angelo,[1] and who comforted those who were full of sorrow. And the other brothers kissed[2] devoutly the bed of her who was dying. The sweet sisters grieved for the departure of their sweet mother, and wept tenderly ; when they remembered that they would no more see her their hearts were full of bitterness and anguish, for that all their joy and solace and comfort would vanish with their mother, and they were in tears and sorrow without consolation for their good mother. If they had not been ashamed they would all have fled, for the more they wished not to weep the more bitterly were they tormented inwardly. You heard no more speech in the cloister, for their grief was so great they had nought else but wailing and tears of anguish. Their faces were swollen and inflamed with weeping, for the abundance of the heart sends tears of pain to the

[1] "Who was the first soldier to enter the Order, and was full of all courtesy and kindness," says the *Speculum Perf.* (ed. Sabatier), cap. lxxxv.

[2] The Latin legend says : "The other was Brother Leo, who in silence kissed," &c. Leo was the favoured companion and confessor of St. Francis.



ST. CLARE ON HER DEATH-BED HAS A VISION OF A COMPANY OF VIRGINS WEARING CROWNS

eyes. Then the holy virgin began to speak to her soul quite low, and said: "Go holily, for you have had good guidance on the path where thou shouldst walk, which will lead you to the right road. Go bravely, for He who created thee has sanctified thee, and loves thee so as a mother doth her infant. Good Lord God, blessed art Thou who created me." Then one of her sisters asked her to whom she spoke. She replied: "I spoke to my blessed soul, and without doubt to her blessed and glorious conductor who was not far off." Then she said to one of her daughters: "Dear one, do you see the King of Glory, whom I see?" But it was the will of God that another sister should see that which she could not see, for she saw with the eyes of her head between the tears which she wept a very gracious sight and very comforting, and nevertheless she was pierced to the heart by a dart full of pain. For as she turned her eyes towards the door of the house she saw a great company of virgins enter the house, all dressed in white robes, and each carried a crown of gold on her head, and amongst the others there was one more bright and more beautiful than the others, who wore a crown pierced in the manner of a censer, and from the piercings shone forth so great a light that all the

house was filled with it and night was turned into day. And this lady who was so bright came near to the bed of the spouse of Her Son, and leant towards her very sweetly and kissed her tenderly. Then the virgins brought a mantle full of very great beauty and they hastened as if with desire to cover the body of St. Clare and to serve her and to do well by the house. And the day after the feast of St. Laurence[1] the noble virgin died, and she gave up her soul, which was crowned eternally. Very gloriously her soul was separated from her flesh when her body remained on earth and her spirit rose to be with Our Lord, who was her life. And blessed be the company who from the valley of this wretched world conducted the blessed soul to the mountain of everlasting life. And now the blessed Clare is in the company of those who are in the courts of Paradise. And thus is the humble life that she led in this world changed to the high table where there are great delights. She has for the poor life of humility and bitterness the blessed kingdom of Paradise, where she is robed in robes of imperishable glory, there where He draws us who lives and reigns without end. Amen.

[1] The feast of St. Laurence is on August 10th. St. Clare therefore died on August 11th, the feast of St. Ruffino, the patron saint of Assisi. She died in 1253.

How the Pope came to say the Office, and how it came to pass.

Soon was spread abroad the news that the virgin had departed. And when the people of the city of Assisi heard tell the news, they came to that place in such a great multitude that it seemed that in Assisi there could be left neither man nor woman, but that all came crying loudly: "Good lady and friend of God;" and, weeping very tenderly, they ran quickly to tell the Provost of the town, and with them a great company of cavaliers, and many others who all day and all night guarded her honourably, for they wished no harm or damage to come to their precious treasure which lay there.[1] The next day came the Pope[2] and the Cardinals to that place, and all the city of Assisi came to Saint Damiano. And it came to pass that when they should have begun to say the Office of the Dead, the Pope said that they should rather say the Office of Virgins than the service of the dead, for it seemed he

[1] The citizens of Assisi were doubtless afraid lest the Perugians or other powerful neighbours should come and carry off the saint's body. Similar care was taken to guard the body of St. Francis before his burial.

[2] Innocent IV.

would rather canonise her than bury her. Then replied the Bishop of Ostia that he was more accustomed to say the Office of the Dead in such a chant and such a place. Then they sang the Mass of the Dead, and the Pope and the Cardinals and the Prelates were all present. And the Bishop of Ostia began to preach, and he took for his matter how all the world was vanity. And he began to praise greatly the virgin, and to tell how she despised the world. Then the Cardinals who were priests placed themselves around the precious Body of Jesus Christ, and performed the Office devoutly, as it behoved them. And because it seemed neither right nor reasonable that the body of Saint Clare should be so far from the city, they caused it to be carried to St. George's Church,[1] praising Our Lord with great joy. And also in St. George's was first buried the body of St. Francis. And it was thus like a prophecy that he who had prepared for the holy virgin the way of life while she lived, went before her and prepared her resting place when she died. And from that time

[1] The church of St. George is now a chapel of the great church of Santa Chiara. The body of St. Clare was discovered on September 23, 1850, beneath the high altar of the church of Santa Chiara, whither it had been translated on October 3, 1260. The saint's skeleton, cased in a composition effigy, now rests in the crypt beneath the church.



Funus S. CLARÆ, magnâ pompâ, magno multorum concurſu, cum hymnis et laudibus, à cœnobio S. Damiani, elatum eſt Aſſiſium, in templo S. Georgij tumulandum, vbi S. P. Franciſci corpus conditum fuerat. Ita, qui viam vitæ, viuenti præmonſtrauit, etiam mortuæ locum, quodam præſagio, præparauit. Vitæ cap. 28.

30.

ST. CLARE'S BODY IS FOLLOWED BY THE POPE AND THE PEOPLE OF ASSISI TO THE CHURCH OF SAN GIORGIO

on came every day great plenty of people to the tomb of Saint Clare and praised Our Lord and said: "Truly this was a true saint, to whom God gave great honour on earth. Alas, sweet virgin, pray to Our Lord for us. Alas, thou wert the first of the poor holy Ladies who have drawn so many to penitence, they are without number whom you have drawn to eternal life. And after only a little while Agnes, her sister, died, and followed Clare into the unending joy, full of bliss, there where are the daughters of Sion who were their sisters and are heiresses of the kingdom of Paradise, there where they feel the sweetness of God. And Agnes, her sister, is in the joy that Saint Clare had promised her before she died, for even as Clare put herself first from the world and put herself upon the cross of penitence, for which reason is she resplendent in Paradise, so did her sister Agnes follow her full quickly out of this mortal life full of tears and sorrows to Our Lord who is the life of the soul, who called her to Heaven, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, for ever. Amen.

The Miracles that she wrought after her Death.

The miracles of the saints are greatly to be praised and honoured and are witnesses that they were in life good and holy and full of perfection. We know not of many miracles worked by Master Saint John the Baptist, none the less is he far greater than many others are. And because of this I say that the most holy life that Clare led should suffice to show how truly she was a saint, if it were not for the common people, who have greater devotion and greater faith for the saints when they see signs and miracles worked through them by God. Saint Clare was in her life full of virtue and of great merit, notwithstanding she became very famous and full of savour and full of great miracles, so that it was very clear to the Cardinals of Rome. This vow of truth that I made, and my own conscience on the other hand, have constrained me to write as truthfully as was in my power the life and miracles of the Lady Saint Clare, notwithstanding I have let pass many things.

Of him who was delivered from the Enemy.

A child who was named Giocamino of Perugia had a devil. Sometimes it made him fall into the fire when he was not on his guard. Sometimes it threw him on the ground; at other times it made him bite the stones, and again to tear his face, so that his body was all bleeding; it twisted his mouth and thrust his tongue out; at other times it threw him down suddenly and twisted him so that he pushed his head between his legs. And every day this malady would seize him twice, and tormented him so greatly that no one could help him, for, in spite of their care, he was tormented. The priest could give neither counsel nor remedy; but the father, whose name was Guidalotto, when he found that he could get counsel from no man about this malady, began to call upon Saint Clare very loudly: "Behold," he said, "Lady Saint Clare, who art worthy of all honour, I bring you my poor child. I pray you, sweet saint, for all that I can pray, that you will send health to my child." And then he went to her tomb and put the child over the virgin's body, and immediately he was delivered of his infirmity, and was never again sick of that malady.

Another Miracle.

Alexander of Perugia[1] had seven devils in his body which had such perfectly great power over him that they made him fly from a rock right over the river as though he were a bird. And they made him descend by a little thin branch which hung over the river. But it happened that for his sins he hung on his left side, and his hand was withered, and many tried with divers medicines to cure him. But nought that he did served him anything. Then he came to the tomb of Saint Clare with great repentance and began to beseech Saint Clare that she would aid him, and immediately he was delivered of the three maladies, for the hand that was withered was cured, and his side was cured, and he was delivered of the passion of the devils which held him. And he was entirely made whole before the sepulchre of Saint Clare.

[1] The Latin text says: "Alessandrina of Fratta, in the diocese of Perugia."

Of a Woman out of her Mind who was cured.

A woman who was from France was sitting one night outside her courtyard.[1] And she fell at once into a sickness in which she could not speak, and was out of her mind, and it seized her body so that she had no repose and was strange and hideous to look upon. None could hold her so that she should not break her body. And they tied her with cords to a litter, and those of her country carried her to Saint Clare, because of the great faith that they had. And when she was brought and laid there where the virgin reposed, she was cured entirely of her malady.

Of him who was cured of the Evil of St. Loup.

Another man who was named Valentino of Spello had so horrible a malady that he was struck down by it six times a day. And by it he was affected in one leg so that he could not walk. And they put him on an ass and took

[1] Du Puis has again misread the Latin text. It should read: "A youth who was from France, and who was attached to the Roman Court, fell into a sickness," &c.

him where lay the body of Saint Clare. And he was there, before the tomb, three days and three nights. On the fourth day, though no one touched him, his leg began to grow, and it made so great a noise that it seemed as though the bones were breaking. And then he was cured of both his maladies.

Of the Blind Man who saw plain.

Giacobello, the son of Apolino, had been blind for the space of twelve years, so that they had to lead him, for when he had no leader he went ever astray. And once it happened that the child who led him let him go alone, and he fell, so that he broke his arm and had a great scar on his head. And it happened that one night as he slept there appeared to him a lady who said to him: "Giacobello, why do you not come to me that I may cure you?" The next day he told with trembling his dream to two blind men. And the other blind men told him that a little while before a lady had died in the city of Assisi by whom God did marvellous miracles, and all those who came to her tomb were cured. Immediately he had heard it he was not slothful, but hastened greatly, and came the first night to



Photo: G. Carloforti

SHRINE OF ST. CLARE IN THE CRYPT OF "SANTA CHIARA"

Spoleto. And this same night he saw again the vision that he saw before. The next day, if he had had the power to run for joy and the desire to see light, gladly would he have done so. Nevertheless he went on his way so that he came to Assisi. But he found so great a number of people at the convent and the place where she lay, that he could neither enter nor come near the tomb. And he put a stone on his head and waited with great devotion and in great sorrow and anguish, vexed that he could not enter. And that night whilst he slept he heard a voice which said: "Giacomo, if thou canst enter herein, God will do thee great good." And the next day, when he had awakened he began to pray with many tears that for the love of God he might receive his sight. And he begged the compassion of those who stood round that they would lead him in. And the people began to make way for him. And then he took off his shoes and his garments with great devotion, with his belt round his neck. And thus he reached the tomb and there slept awhile. And Saint Clare said to him: "Rise up, for thou art cured;" and immediately he rose and saw clearly. And when he perceived that he saw clearly the light of day, by the merits of Saint Clare, he praised and gave glory to Our

Lord who had done such great things for him. And he prayed the people around to bless the Lord.

Of him who was cured in his Hand.

A man born in Perugia, who was by name Giovanni, son of Martino, went to fight against Foligno. And it happened that one and the other began to defy each other with cries. And they began to throw stones one at the other, so that good Giovanni had his hand hurt by a stone. And because he had great desire to be cured he spent much money, but no one could cure him of the malady in his hand, and nothing that he could do would cure it, and he had such great pain that he desired often that it should be cut off. But when he heard news of the great marvels that Our Lord did through Saint Clare, he made a vow to her that he would visit her. And then he went to the sepulchre of Saint Clare, and brought an image of wax in his hand and laid himself upon the tomb, and immediately he was perfectly cured.

Of the Crooked Man who was made straight.

Another man, who was called Pierino, of the village of Bettona, had been three years sick, and

had languished so long that he was all dried up with the power of sickness. He had so great pain in his veins that he had become contracted in such manner that he was all bent, so that with pain he walked on crutches. And his father had for him all the good doctors that he knew and could hear of, and with good will he spent his money that he should be cured. But when he heard the doctors say that no physic could help him, he thought that he would beg the aid of Saint Clare, who had done such great marvels. Then he had his child brought and laid before the sepulchre. He had not lain there long before he was quite cured by the grace of God and the merits of the virgin. And then he rose up safe and sound, and he gave thanks to Our Lord and to Saint Clare, and he prayed the people to praise Our Lord and Saint Clare, who had given him health.

Of the Lame Child that she cured.

There was a child of the age of twelve in the town of Saint Quiritte, in the bishopric of Assisi, who was born lame, and had his legs twisted and his feet turned in. And he was so disjointed that hardly could he lift himself when he was

seated. His mother had often vowed him to Saint Francis, but nevertheless he was never cured. And when she heard tell of the new miracles that God worked by Saint Clare, she carried her child to the sepulchre and there remained some days. But she did not stay long before the bones of his thighs and his legs began to grow within his flesh. And he was straightened naturally and walked upright and was quite cured. And that which Master Saint Francis would not do for all their prayers, the blessed virgin did by the virtue of God.

Of a Child who had never walked.

A townsman of Gubbio, who was named Jocopo, had a child of five years whose feet were not able to carry him, so that he had never walked nor could ever walk, wherefore the father wept often and very greatly mourned, for it was a deformity to his house. And it seemed to him to be a reproach to him that his child should be thus disfigured, for he lay sideways upon the ground, and fell among the cinders, going on all fours. And sometimes he would lay hold on the bench to raise himself, but he had not the power to walk. He desired by nature to raise

himself, but nature and strength failed him. Wherefore the father and mother vowed him to Saint Clare to be her servant if he should be cured by her merit. And as soon as they had made their vow, the virgin cured her servant, and he stood up and walked very easily. And when the father and mother brought him to Saint Clare he went running and leaping, praising God, and the father and mother offered him to God and Saint Clare.



Of a Woman who was bent.

A woman of the town of Bevagna had been a long time stiffened in her back and could not walk without a stick, nor could she stand up, and she walked with great effort and great pain. And it happened that on one Friday she had herself carried to the tomb of Saint Clare. And the next day, Saturday, she returned all full of joy to her house, she who the day before could not walk to the virgin Clare, but had to be carried.

Of her who was cured of Scrofula.

A maiden of the lands of Perugia had her throat sore and inflamed with a malady named

scrofula. And she had long borne this illness, and it ran through her whole body, so that she had in her neck twelve bags which they called glands, so that it seemed that her neck was greater than her head. And often her mother had taken her to Saint Clare and prayed her often that she would cure her daughter. And it happened that whilst this maiden watched one night before the tomb of Saint Clare, she began to sweat, and the sweat rose and the malady began to diminish. And the scrofula began to move and to depart. And after a little the malady went away so entirely by the merits of Saint Clare, that no sign was shown that there ever was any sickness.

Of one of the Sisters who was cured of the Sickness of Saint Loup.

One of the sisters of this virgin's Order, whilst she was still living, had another illness in her throat, like her we told of before, and she was called Andrea. But it was a thing of marvel how amongst the other sisters who were like precious stones all full of the fire of the Holy Spirit, how amongst jewels so glorious could dwell one of so cold a soul as this Andrea, who

was foolish and witless amongst the virgins. And to her it happened one night that her throat was so constrained that with little more she would have strangled. And thus she wished to die against the will of God, and to dispose of herself and her body against the will of Our Lord. But Saint Clare knew at once of this thing by the grace of the Holy Ghost, and she said to one of her sisters: "Run quickly, hasten and go into the house and bring a soft egg and give it to Sister Andrea to suck, and then return hither to me." And the sister hastened and came to Andrea and found she could no longer speak. And she lifted her up as swiftly as she could and carried her to Saint Clare. "Now," said to her the holy lady, "poor sinner, confess your sins and your evil thoughts, for I know well that Our Lord will cure you of your sickness. But amend your life, for you will die of some other illness than this one." As soon as Saint Clare had said this she began to repent in her heart and amended marvellously her life. And she was wholly cured of the scrofula by the will of God, but she died afterwards of another sickness, and did not long remain in this life.

Of the Maiden who was delivered from the Wolf.

In the country of Assisi were terrible and fierce wolves who cruelly tormented the children and the people and all the country, and attacked the people often and were wont to eat them. And there was a woman in the country of whose children a wolf had already eaten one of her sons. Nor had this woman one whit forgotten her son, but bewailed him often. And the wolf essayed to take another prey as he had done before, and lay in wait. And it happened that this woman of whom I have spoken was busied within her house, and her child was sitting without. And on a sudden behold the wolf seized the child by the head and carried her off into the woods, and he drove his teeth very deeply into her head in carrying her off. And the men who were in the vineyards heard the child cry out, for she was in great anguish, and they were not used to hear so terrible a voice from a child, and they came to the mother and said to her: "Take heed that thou hast all thy children, for we have heard a cry of a child." And immediately the mother looked and beheld that the wolf was carrying away another of her

children. And then she began to cry marvellous loud, and to call upon Saint Clare, and said, "Ah, Saint Clare, glorious virgin, give back to this poor creature her child, for if thou givest her not back to me, in truth I will go drown myself." And the neighbours ran after the wolf with all their might, and found the child in the wood where the wolf had left her. And they found a dog which was licking her wounds, for the wolf had just taken her by the head, and then by the thighs, the better to carry her. Then came the mother and the neighbours and took the child to Saint Clare, and showed the child to every sort of person, and gave thanks to God and to Saint Clare for the miracle, for the good woman and her child that He had given back.

Of the Maiden carried away by the Wolf who was saved.

A maiden of the village of Cavarn was once in a room holding the head of another woman against her knees,[1] and behold a wolf which was wont to attack people ran in to seize the maiden as his

[1] The circumstances are omitted which explain this situation. The maiden was engaged in dressing the hair of another woman, who rested her head on her knees.

prey. And when she saw it she was much afraid, for she thought it had been her dog that came in to her when she heard the wolf approach; but the wolf ran swiftly to the maiden and seized her face in his jaws. And thus he carried off his prey into the woods, and the woman whose head was on the lap of the maiden was all astounded, and she began to speak of Saint Clare and to beg from the saint help and succour: "Save us! I implore thee, help this maiden in this present danger." And she whom the wolf carried off spoke marvellous words against the wolf and said: "Hast thou, then, the power, thief that thou art, to carry me off, me who am a noble lady and vowed to so great a virgin?" At these words that the maiden said, the wolf was all confused and ashamed, so that he put down the maiden on the earth and ran away, just as the thief who is surprised in his thieving; and he left the maiden and ran into the forest.

Here ends the Legend of the Lady Saint Clare.[1]

[1] In the Latin legend there follows a brief account of the saint's canonisation. Saint Clare was canonised by Pope Alexander IV. at Anagni on 11th August 1255, just two years after her death; and copies of the bull of canonisation were sent to different countries. The festival of Saint Clare was, by the Pope's order, to be celebrated throughout the Catholic world every year on 12th August. *Cf.* Sbaralea, *Bull Franc.*, ii. pp. 81–84.

Pray for the venerable and virtuous religious named Sister Clare of Bruyères, Abbess of the devout Convent of Madame Saint Clare at Seurre, who caused to be transcribed this present work of the Brother Francis Dupuis of the Order of the Friars Minor.

1563

In this small and simple book
With goodwill have I described
The life most pure and always bright
Of our mother holy Clare,
Clear in name and clear in fame,
For which her daughters, with good works,
With holy desire and pure will,
Give thanks to her at all times.
As for me, with right good heart
I will serve and honour her,
For her bright name Clare is mine,
But my surname is called Heather ;
The heather bush, humble and low,
Bears a flower full of grace,
And even in full arid lands,
Far in the desert waste and dry,
Often doth it take its root.
Thus also should we take our root
In the holy desert of the cloister,
That we may gain the nourishment
That giveth us Eternal Life.
For we all needs must die to live.

He that hath written this book
Writeth it before his death.
You must believe me without mirth
That always Francis desireth death.
Brother Francis is his name,
And his surname meaneth Grave.
All they who read, both man and maid,
The holy life of Clare, should hold
Francis the scribe in memory.
Likewise me, your humble father,[1]
And my dearly beloved heather,
The which may God always preserve
Without omission or neglect,
With all my flock whole and entire.
So that at last our God may give
In holy heaven place and room,
So that together we God may praise
On the pleasant hill of Sion
In secula seculorum.

Puteus aquarum viventium.

Pray for the writer.

[1] The transcriber.



Photo: G. Carloforti

ASSISI

PASSAGES FROM THE "FIORETTI," "SPECULUM PERFECTIONIS," AND THOMAS OF CELANO

How Saint Clare ate with Saint Francis.[1]

FIORETTI. Chapter XIV.

Saint Francis, when he was at Assisi, was wont often to visit Saint Clare, giving her holy counsels. And she had a great desire to take bread once with him, and to this end she prayed him many times, but he would never give her this consolation. Wherefore his companions, seeing the great desire of Saint Clare, said to Saint Francis: "Father, to us it seemeth that this rigidity is not according to divine charity, that thou wilt not grant this little thing to Sister Clare, a virgin so holy and so pleasing to God, that she may eat with you, more especially considering that she has through thy teaching abandoned the riches and

[1] Cf. *Actus S. Francisci*, cap. xv.; Barth. de Pisa in *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 355.

pomps of the world. And, in truth, if she had asked thee a greater boon than this, thou shouldst grant it to thy spiritual plant." Then replied Saint Francis: "Doth it seem to you that I should grant this to her?" Then his companions answered: "Yes, Father, it is a fitting thing that thou give her this consolation." Then said Saint Francis: "Since it seemeth so to you, it seemeth so to me. But in order that she may have the more consolation, I wish that this repast may be made in Santa Maria degli Angeli, for she has been long enclosed in San Damiano, and it will rejoice her to see a little the place of Santa Maria, where she was brought to be made the spouse of Jesus Christ, and there we will eat together in the name of God." When the day appointed was come, Saint Clare came forth from the monastery with one companion, and, accompanied by the companions of Saint Francis, they came to Santa Maria degli Angeli, and devoutly saluted the Virgin Mary before her altar, where she had been shorn and veiled, and then they took her to show her all that place, until it was the hour to dine. And in that place Saint Francis made them dress the table upon the bare earth, as it was their custom, and when the hour of dining was come they set themselves down together,



ST. CLARE DINES WITH ST. FRANCIS AT THE PORTIUNCULA

Saint Francis and Saint Clare and one of the company of Saint Francis with the companion of Saint Clare, and then all the other company drew near humbly to the table. And at the first viands Saint Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so marvellously, that there descended upon them the abundance of divine grace, and they all were rapt in God. And as they were thus rapt with their eyes and their hands lifted to heaven, the people of Assisi and Bettona and those of the country round saw that Saint Mary of the Angels and all the place and the wood, which then was close to the house, was burning greatly, and it seemed that it was a great fire which comprised the church and the house and the wood together. For which cause the men of Assisi ran there with great haste to put out the fire, believing entirely that everything was burning. But coming to the place and finding no fire, they entered in and found Saint Francis with Saint Clare and all their company rapt in God with contemplation and sitting round that humble table. From which it is without doubt to be understood that this was divine fire, and not material, which God had made appear miraculously to demonstrate and signify the fire of divine love which burnt in the hearts of these holy brothers

and holy monks, from which they drew great consolation. Then after a great space Saint Francis returned to himself and Saint Clare, together with the others, and felt themselves much comforted by the spiritual supper, that they heeded little the food of the body. Thus this blessed meal being ended, Saint Clare, accompanied by many (with her companions), returned to San Damiano, and the sisters, when they saw her, had great joy, for they feared that Saint Francis had sent her to rule another convent, as he had already sent Sister Agnes, her holy sister, as Abbess to rule the Convent of Monticelli in Florence; for Saint Francis once had said to Saint Clare: "Be ready if it should be needful that I send you to another house:" and she, like an obedient daughter, had given answer: "Father, I am ever ready to go whither thou sendest me." Therefore the sisters rejoiced greatly when they saw her again, and Saint Clare remained from then onwards greatly consoled. Christ be praised.

How Saint Francis was in doubt whether he should preach or pray.[1]

FIORETTI. Chapter XV.

The humble servant of God, Francis, a little while after his conversion, having already gathered together many companions and received them into the Order, fell into deep thought and great doubting as to what he should do — whether to give himself only to prayer or sometimes to preaching, and about this he longed much to know the will of God. And because the holy humility that was in him did not let him trust in himself or in his own prayers, he thought to seek the divine will through the prayers of others. Wherefore he called Brother Masseo and said thus to him, "Go to Sister Clare, and say to her from me that she and those of her sisters who are the most devout pray to God that He will show me which is the best, that I give myself to preaching or only to prayer. Then go to Brother Silvester and say the same to him." So Brother Masseo went and, according to the bidding of Saint Francis, did his embassy first to Saint Clare

[1] Cf. *Actus S. Franc.*, cap. xvi. Barth. de Pisa, De Conformit in *Anal. Franc.*, iv. pp. 73 and 467.

and then to Brother Silvester. He having received the message, set himself immediately to prayer, and having heard the divine answer, he turned to Brother Masseo and said this, "Thus saith God, that you say to Brother Francis that God has not called him to this state for himself alone, but that he may make fruitful many souls, and that many may be saved through him." When he had received this answer, Brother Masseo returned to Saint Clare to know what she had received from God, and she replied that she and her companions had heard the same answer as Brother Silvester. And with this Brother Masseo returned to Saint Francis, who received him with great love, washing his feet and preparing food for him. And after he had eaten, Saint Francis called Brother Masseo into the wood, and, kneeling down before him, he drew back his hood and, making a cross with his arms, he said, "What does my Lord Jesus Christ command?" And Brother Masseo replied, that to Brother Silvester and to Saint Clare and her sisters Christ had given answer and revealed that His will is that thou go into the world and preach, for He has elected thee not for thyself alone, but for the salvation of others. Then Saint Francis, having heard this answer, and knowing through it the

will of Christ, arose and with great fervour said, "Let us go in the name of God," and took for his companions Brother Masseo and Brother Agnolo—both holy men.

How Christ appeared to Saint Francis, being afflicted in his eyes.

FIORETTI. Chapter XVIII.

Saint Francis being once gravely afflicted in his eyes, Master Ugolino, Cardinal Protector of the Order, because of the great tenderness he had for him, wrote to him that he should go to him at Rieti, where was a most excellent doctor of the eyes. When Saint Francis first received the letter of the Cardinal, he went first to San Damiano, where was Saint Clare, the devoted spouse of Christ, to give her certain consolations and then to go to the Cardinal; and being there Saint Francis the following night grew so much worse in his eyes that he could not see one atom of light; wherefore, since he was unable to depart, Saint Clare made for him a little cell of reeds, in which he could the better repose himself. But Saint Francis, through the pain of his infirmity and through the multitude of rats which annoyed him much, could in no

manner get any peace either night or day. And, still enduring these pains and tribulations, he began to think and to understand that they were a scourge from God for his sins; and he began to thank God with all his heart, and cried with a loud voice: "My Lord, I am deserving of this, and of much worse. My Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd, who towards our sins and unworthiness showest Thy mercy through pains and anguish of the body, show Thy mercy to me, Thy poor sinner, that through no infirmity nor anguish nor pain I may be separated from Thee!" And it came to pass that to this prayer there answered a voice from heaven, which said, "Francis, answer me—if all the earth were gold, and all the mountains and the hills and the rocks were precious stones, and all the seas and the rivers and the springs were balm, and thou didst find a treasure far greater than these things, as much greater as gold is than earth, than balm is than water, and precious stones than hills and rocks, and this noble treasure should be given thee through this infirmity, shouldst thou not be well content and much rejoiced?" And Saint Francis answered, "Lord, I am not worthy of this great treasure." And the voice of God said, "Rejoice, Francis, for this is the treasure of eternal life, the which I reserve for



Photo: G. Carloforti

THE CONVENT OF SAN DAMIANO

thee, and with which I invest thee from this hour, and this infirmity and infliction is the price of that blessed treasure." Then Saint Francis called his companion with great joy in this glorious promise and said, "Let us come to the Cardinal." And consoling first Saint Clare with holy words and humbly taking leave of her, he took the path to Rieti.[1]

How Saint Clare, in obedience to the Pope, blessed the Table, and how upon each Bread appeared the Cross, cut by the miracle of God.[2]

FIORETTI. Chapter XXIII.

Saint Clare, the devoted disciple of the Cross ot Christ and the noble plant of Saint Francis, was of so great sanctity that not only the Bishops and the Cardinals but even the Pope himself desired to see her and speak with her, and oft-times visited her himself. Amongst other occasions he came once to the monastery to her to hear her speak of things heavenly and divine,

[1] Cf. *Actus S. Franc.*, cap. xxi.
[2] Cf. *Actus S. Franc.*, cap. xliii.; Chron. XXIV. Gen. in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. pp. 182 and 274; Barth. de Pisa in *Anal. Franc.*, iv. p. 352.

and being thus together in holy conversation, Saint Clare bade them prepare the table and lay on it the bread, that the Holy Father might bless it. Then when their spiritual converse was ended, Saint Clare knelt with great reverence and prayed him that he would be pleased to bless the bread that was laid on the table. And the Holy Father answered, "Most faithful Sister Clare, I would that you should bless this bread and make above it the sign of the Cross to which thou hast given thy whole self." And Saint Clare said, "Most Holy Father, pardon me, for I should be worthy of great reprehension if I should presume to make this benediction." And the Pope replied, "That this may not be imputed to presumption, but to the virtue of obedience, I command you in holy obedience that above this bread thou make the sign of Holy Cross and bless it in the name of God." Then Saint Clare, like a true daughter of obedience, blessed the bread devoutly with the sign of the Holy Cross. O marvel! suddenly on all the breads there appeared the sign of the Cross cut out most beautifully, and then some of the bread was eaten and some was reserved for miracles. And the Holy Father, seeing that a miracle had been performed, taking some of the bread and giving thanks to God, he



ST. CLARE BLESSES THE BREAD AT THE COMMAND OF POPE INNOCENT IV.

departed, leaving Saint Clare with his benediction. At that time there dwelt in that monastery Sister Ortolana, the mother of Saint Clare, and Sister Agnes, her sister, both, together with Saint Clare, full of virtue and of the Holy Spirit, and with many other holy nuns; to whom Saint Francis sent many sick persons, and they with their prayers and the sign of the Cross gave back health to all. To the glory of God. Amen.

How Saint Francis did admonish the Sisters of Saint Clare.

From the SPECULUM PERFECTIONIS. Chapter XC.[1]

After that the Blessed Francis had made his "Praises unto the Lord of His creatures," he made also certain holy words with music for the comforting and edification of the Poor Ladies, knowing that they were sore troubled by reason of his infirmity. And for that he was not able to visit them in person, he sent the words unto them by the companions. For he was fain in those words to lay open his will unto them, to wit, how they ought to live and converse humbly and be of one mind in charity. For he perceived

[1] Transl. Sebastian Evans. David Nutt.

that their conversion and holy conversation did not only tend to the exaltation of the brethren's religion, but to the exceeding great edification of the Church Universal.

But knowing that from the beginning of their conversion they had led a life passing strait and poverty-stricken, he was moved with pity and compassion toward them. Whence in those same words he besought them that even as the Lord from many parts had assembled them together in one to holy charity, holy poverty, and holy obedience, so ought they ever to live and to die therein. And specially did he admonish them that out of such alms as the Lord might give them they should discreetly make provision for their bodies with cheerfulness and thanksgiving, and most of all, how they that were heal in their toils that they did undergo on behalf of their sick sisters, and they themselves that were sick should also be patient in their infirmities.[1]

[1] *Cf.* Testament of St. Clare (*Seraph. Legislat. Textus orig.*, p. 276). "He (St. Francis) was not content in his lifetime to exhort us by frequent discourses and by his deeds to love and observe holy poverty, but he also sent us many written words," &c.

How, nigh his death, St. Francis sent word unto St. Clare that she should see him, and how it was fulfilled after his death.

Speculum Perfectionis. Chapter CVIII.

In the week that the Blessed Francis did pass away, the Lady Clare, the first sapling of the poor sisters of St. Damian of Assisi, the chiefest rival of the Blessed Francis in the observance of gospel perfection, fearing lest she should die before him, for at that time both lay grievously sick, wept most bitterly and would not be comforted, for that she thought she should not see before her departure her one father after God, the Blessed Francis, her first comforter and master, and her first founder in the grace of God.

And therefore did she signify this unto the Blessed Francis by a certain brother, which when the holy man did hear, forasmuch as he did love her above all other with fatherly affection, he was moved with pity toward her. But considering that the thing she would, to wit, to see him, could not be brought about, for her consolation and that of all the sisterhood, he did

write unto her his blessing in a letter, and did absolve her of all defect in case she had done aught against his admonition, and against the commandments and counsels of the Son of God. And so that she should lay aside all sadness and grief, he said unto the brother whom he had sent: "Go and tell Sister Clare to lay aside all sorrow and sadness for that she cannot see me just now, forasmuch as in truth let her know before her departure both she herself and my sisters shall see me, and shall be greatly comforted as concerning me."

But it came to pass when a little afterward the Blessed Francis had passed away in the night, that on the morrow the whole people and clergy of Assisi came and took away his holy body from the place where he had passed away, with hymns and lauds, each one bearing aloft branches of trees, and thus did they carry the same by the will of the Lord to St. Damian's, so that the word might be fulfilled which the Lord had spoken by the Blessed Francis for the comfort of His daughters and His handmaidens.

And removing the iron lattice whereby the sisters were wont to communicate and to hear the word of God, the brethren took the holy body from the bier and held it between their

arms for a long space at the opening until that the Lady Clare and her sisters had been comforted by the sight thereof, albeit they were overcome and full of sorrow and many tears, seeing themselves made orphans of the consolations and admonitions of so dear a father.

How St. Clare wept over the body of St. Francis.

1 Celano, ii. 10.

In the morning the people of Assisi, with the whole of the clergy, assembled, and took the sacred body from the place where he had died and brought it with honour into the city with hymns and praises and blare of trumpets. All carried boughs of olive and other trees, performing the sacred obsequies with solemnity; and with many lights and with loud-sounding voices they discharged the duty of praise. And when, as the sons bore their father and the flock followed their shepherd hastening to the Shepherd of all, they reached the place where he himself had planted the Religion and Order of Sacred Virgins and Poor Ladies, and laid him in the church of St. Damian, wherein his said daughters

dwelt whom he had won to the Lord, a little window was opened through which the handmaids of Christ are wont at the appointed time to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Body. The coffin also was opened wherein lay hid a treasure of super-celestial virtues, wherein he was being borne by few who was wont to bear many. And lo! the Lady Clare, who was indeed a shining light through her holy merits, and was the mother of the rest and the first plant of this holy order, came with her daughters to look upon the father that spake not to them, and would not return to them, for he was hastening elsewhither. And as they looked upon him with repeated sighs, with deep groaning, and with many tears, they began to cry with choked voices: "Father, father, what shall we do? Why forsakest thou us in our misery, or to whom dost thou leave us in our desolation? Why didst thou not send us before rejoicing to the place whither thou art going—us whom thou leavest thus grieving here? What dost thou bid us to do, shut up thus in this prison—us whom thou art determined nevermore to visit as thou wast wont to do? With thee all our consolation departs, and no such solace is left to us, buried in the world! Who shall comfort

us in such poverty—poverty not less of merit than of [temporal] things? O father of the poor! lover of poverty! who shall succour us in temptation, O thou who hast known countless temptations, thou cautious trier of temptations? Who shall comfort us troubled ones in our tribulation, thou our helper in exceeding great tribulations which came upon us? O most bitter separation, O disastrous forsaking! O death too dreadful who art slaughtering thousands of sons and daughters bereft of such a father, while thou hastenest to remove past recall him through whom any zealous efforts of ours have chiefly prospered!"

But virginal bashfulness restrained their much weeping; and indeed it was very unseemly to wail for one over whose passing hence the angel army hovered in throngs, while the fellow-citizens of the saints and they of God's household rejoiced. And so those ladies, divided between sorrow and joy, kissed his radiant hands adorned with most precious gems and flashing with pearls: and when he was taken away the door was shut which shall nevermore be opened to such woe.









TITLE-PAGE OF ANDREAS COLLAERT'S VOLUME OF ENGRAVINGS, DATE 1630

1. St. Clare protecting her sisters under her mantle; 2. Blessed Hortulana, St. Clare's mother; 3. Blessed Agnes, St. Clare's sister; 4. Blessed Agnes of Bohemia, daughter of the King of Bohemia, betrothed to Emperor Frederick II.

The four Popes reigning during her life: Honorius III., Gregory IX., Innocent IV., and Alexander IV.

FOUR LETTERS OF ST. CLARE

PREFATORY NOTE

THE writings attributed to Saint Clare are the Rule of the Poor Clares, confirmed by Pope Innocent IV. in 1253; the Testament of Saint Clare, and five letters. Critics dispute as to whether the saint herself actually wrote the Rule or whether it was written by Cardinal Rainaldo, the Protector of the Order, under the direction of Saint Clare. Certain it is that it represents her heart's desire concerning the vocation of her Order; and many passages in it are surely her own words.[1]

There is also much controversy over the authenticity of the Testament. The Jesuit critic Van Ortroy is against it;[2] and so are Mgr. Bonaventura da Sorrento and others.[3] Yet when

[1] *e.g.* in cap. i.: "*Clara indigna ancilla Christi et plantula beatissimi Patris Francisci*"; and cap. vi., concerning Poverty.

[2] Cf. *Anal. Bolland.*, vol. xxii. p. 360.

[3] See Fr. Paschal Robinson in *Archivum Franc. Hist.*, an. iii. fasc. iii. p. 445.

we come to the Testament after reading the Rule, there is a genuine ring about its style, which makes one hesitate to pronounce against it, even though we cannot trace it farther back than Mark of Lisbon and Wadding.

Of the five letters, four are written to Blessed Agnes, daughter of the King of Bohemia, and are published by the Bollandists in *Acta SS. Martii*, vol. i. pp. 505–507; the fifth letter, addressed to Sister Ermentrude, the foundress of a convent of Poor Clares at Bruges, is found in Wadding, *Annales* ad an. 1257.

The four letters to Agnes of Prague are accepted as genuine even by so difficult a critic as Father Van Ortroy.[1] As to the dates at which the letters were written, we must depend upon circumstantial evidence, since no dates appear in the letters themselves. The first letter was evidently written when Agnes was about to become a Poor Clare: so much we may deduce from the style of address. Agnes entered the Order about 1234.[2] The second letter must have been written before Pentecost, 1239, since at that date Brother Elias, the Minister-General mentioned in the

[1] *Anal. Bolland.*, vol. xxii. p. 360.

[2] See a letter addressed to her by Gregory IX. on August 30, 1234 (Sbaralea, *Bull.*, i. p. 134).

letter, was deposed from the Generalate. From the text of the letter, however, it would seem to have been written in the first years of Agnes's religious life, probably in 1234 or 1235.

The third letter must have been written before May 11, 1238; for on that date Gregory IX. addressed a letter to Agnes[1] in which he refuses to allow her to observe the customs in vogue at San Damiano, as being contrary to the Ugoline Constitutions. The date of the fourth letter is more difficult to determine. The farewell greeting "till we meet before the throne of God," perhaps points to the last years of Clare's life, when the weight of physical suffering was upon her and she felt life was drawing to a close. If this be so, this letter reveals Clare to us in her last days, glowing with that splendid enthusiasm and spirit of love which was characteristic of her early years.

[1] "*Angelis Gaudium*," in Sbaralea, *Bull.*, i. p. 343.

No. I

Clare, the lowly handmaid of Jesus Christ and the humble servants of the virgins who have given themselves to God in the Monastery of San Damiano, pays homage in the spirit to the Lady Agnes, full of fame and honour, daughter of the noble and victorious King of Bohemia, and with lowly reverence implores the bliss of unending joy for her.

We have heard of your holy and blameless life, the fame whereof comes not only now to us, but is spread wide abroad throughout almost the whole world, and with great exultation I rejoice in the Lord. And not only I, but all others who do and desire to do the will of Jesus Christ, and to show forth their homage to Him. For it is manifest that, since you are set in highest honour, you could have embraced the glory of the world. And even might you, as beseemed his majesty and yours, have wedded with the great Cæsar.[1]

Yet with love and inmost desire you did rather choose to live in holy poverty and to mortify the

[1] The Emperor Frederick II. Bl. Agnes of Prague was betrothed to him when she embraced the religious life.

flesh. And you did choose, moreover, to wed a nobler Spouse, even Our Lord Jesus Himself.

He will ever keep perfect your pure, unsullied virginity, for in loving Him you remain ever chaste, united to Him you remain ever a virgin. His strength is greater than all power; His grace is more gracious, His countenance more fair, than all others. His love is singular, exceeding all joys. You are called to the embrace of this Spouse, and He will adorn your breast with precious stones and your ears with jewels of great price, and will set you round with stones of gold and crown you with a golden crown signed with the sign of holiness.

Wherefore, O most sweet sister—nay, rather lady worthy of great reverence—since you are spouse and mother and sister of my Lord Jesus Christ, and are gloriously adorned with the standard of pure virginity and holy poverty—be strengthened in that holy service which you have begun with fervent desire, through the example of poor Jesus Christ, crucified. For He bore for us dire torments on the cross, to deliver us from the power of the Prince of Darkness, by whom we were held captive through the sin of our first parent, and He reconciled us to God the Father.

O blessed Poverty, which giveth unending

joys to them who love thee and hold thee in sweet embrace!

O holy Poverty, to whose possessors is promised the kingdom of heaven and unending glory and bliss of life beyond all doubting.

O sweet Poverty, embraced by Jesus Christ with a perfect love; He who governed and ever governs heaven and earth; who spoke and all things were made. For He said Himself: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man—that is, Christ—has not where to lay His head: bowing His head on the cross, He gave up the ghost. Thus this great Lord entered into the womb of the most pure virgin and willed to come thence into this world, in all lowliness and poverty, that men who were poor and unworthy of heavenly food might become rich in Him and lords of the kingdom of heaven.

Be glad and rejoice, therefore, and let your soul be full of joy. For because you did choose to be despised rather than to be honoured by the world, to possess poverty rather than riches, and a treasure in heaven rather than earthly treasure, you are found worthy to be sister, spouse, and mother of the most high Son of God, and of the glorious Virgin Mary.

Assuredly do you truly know that the kingdom of heaven is promised to the poor man, and that Our Lord gives it to none other than the poor.

For when we love the things of this world the fruit of love is lost. We cannot serve God and Mammon; either we will love the one and hate the other, or we will serve the one and despise the other. You know also that he who is clothed in garments cannot well wrestle with him who is naked; and he who is adorned with fine raiment cannot fight with the world. It is certain that he will be the first to be dragged to the earth who is cumbered with that by which he may be dragged down. We may hardly live sumptuously in this life and hereafter live with Christ in the other world. More easily can a camel pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man into the kingdom of heaven. For this reason you have cast aside your garments—that is, the riches of this world—that in wrestling with its vanities you may the more surely overcome and enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Truly we strike a good bargain when we lay aside earthly things for eternal and barter the things of heaven for those of the world; for we gain a hundredfold and win a life of bliss unending.

Wherefore I have purposed to beseech you, for the love of Jesus Christ, with my most humble prayers, that your highness and holiness will take comfort in this holy service, and that you will go on from this good thing to even better things, from virtue to virtue. And I pray that He to whom you have given yourself with so great devotion and love may graciously adorn you with His overflowing graces.

Also I beseech you in Our Lord with all fervour that you will graciously commend me and the other devout sisters who are with me, to Our Lord in your holy prayers, so that with their help we may obtain mercy with Jesus Christ, and that we may, together with you, be made worthy to enjoy the heavenly vision.

Farewell in Our Lord, and pray for me. Alleluia.[1]

[1] Cf. *Chron. XXIV. Gen.* in *Anal. Franc.*, iii. pp. 184–185, for a version of this letter slightly different from that published by the Bollandists.

No. II

Clare, the useless and worthless handmaid of the Poor Virgins, wishes health to the daughter of the King of kings, the most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ, and therefore to the Queen Agnes. May she ever live in great poverty.

I thank the giver of grace, from whom we believe comes every best gift and every perfect gift, for He has adorned you with so great virtues and brought you to that perfection that, having set yourself to imitate the perfection of the Father, you might become perfect, lest His eyes should see in you aught that was not perfect. It is through this perfection that your Heavenly King unites you to Himself in eternal joys, there where in great glory He sits upon His starry throne. You have despised the pomp of an earthly kingdom, and scorned the delight of wedding with an Emperor, and have become a lover of holy poverty, and have clung to the following of Jesus with humility and burning love. Thus have you been found worthy to be in unity with Him.

I know you to be filled with all virtues, and I will not burden you with many words, though haply nothing seems to you overmuch in those

things from which may be drawn a certain solace. This thing only I press upon you because it is the one thing needful. I exhort you by the love of Him to whom you have offered yourself as a sacrifice that you will be ever mindful of your vocation. Like another Rachel, be ever looking back to its beginning. What you have already, keep; what you have done, do still. Never stand still, but run swiftly, in steadfast imitation and with eager feet, lest in your progress you catch the dust. Go forward with joy and certainty in the way of so great blessedness. Believe no one, consent to none who would draw you from this purpose or who causes any stumbling-block to fall in your way. Run in that way of perfection to which the spirit of God has called you, so that in it you may fulfil your vows to the Most High, and with greater surety tread the way of God's commandments.

And I urge you to follow the counsels of our most revered Father, Brother Elias, Minister-General of the whole Order, and put them before all other counsels given to you to follow, and value them as more precious than any other gift.

But if any would bid you or say to you anything else that is contrary to your perfection and which goes against the vocation God has given

you, follow none such counsel, even though you might thereby win honour and glory above all men. But, like a poor virgin, take to your heart poor Christ. Look upon Him, made full of contempt for your sake, and follow Him. Make yourself full of contempt for His sake in this world.

Look, O most noble Queen, upon your Spouse, and see how He was lovely beyond the sons of men, and yet became unlovely amongst men for your salvation. His body was torn by scourges, and He died in dire torments upon the Cross.

Burn with a great longing to liken yourself to Him. If you endure pain now, you shall enjoy glory. If you share His sorrow, you shall share His joy. If you make your dwelling upon the Cross, you shall share a heavenly dwelling with Him in the brightness of the saints. Your name will be written in the book of life, to be glorious in the ages of ages. You shall exchange the passing things of this world for eternal possessions and live in unending joy.

Farewell, most sweet sister and virgin most blessed in your Spouse. Do you and your sisters graciously commend me and my sisters diligently in your prayers, for we rejoice very greatly because of the good things God has spoken to you.

No. III

Clare, the lowly and worthless handmaid of God, and servant of the Poor Virgins, gives joyful salutation, in the author of salvation and all good things to be desired, to the virgin Agnes, above all others worthy of my homage, sweet sister, dearer to me than all mortals, daughter of the most serene King of Bohemia, and spouse of the most high King of Heaven.

I am full joyful in Our Lord because of your happy health, state, and constant progress in virtue. For I hear that with all courage you persevere in seeking a heavenly prize; and I know that when you imitate poor lowly Jesus Christ, you do by your precious imitation supply my own defects and my other sisters'. Truly do I rejoice, and my great joy no man taketh from me. For what I long for always under heaven you possess even now. And I see you so clothed about with the wonderful prudence and grace of God that you conquer those wary enemies, pride and vanity, which ruin men's hearts and lead them to foolishness. And I see clearly that you have taken to your heart lowly faith and poverty. This treasure is hidden in the field of this world and

in human hearts, and by it great possessions are purchased from Him who created all things out of nothing. With the Apostle's words I proclaim you to be the helpmate of God Himself, and the support and encouragement of the frail members of His ineffable body.

Who then shall hinder my joy in so great benefits? Rejoice also, O most beloved, rejoice always in Our Lord, and let not any bitterness lay hold on you.

O sweet virgin, beloved in Christ, the joy of angels, and the crown of our sisters, place your mind in the mirror of eternity; place your soul in the figure of the Divine Substance, and in contemplating God transform yourself into an image of His Deity. Then you shall feel what His friends feel, and you shall taste the secrets of the joy which the Almighty God keepeth in hiding from the beginning for His chosen ones, and for all those who give themselves to Him, though they still dwell in this deceitful world which seduces those who blindly serve it.

Love Him with your whole heart who with a whole heart offered Himself for you. The sun and moon worship His glory, yet the multitude of men seek not for the reward of this most high Son of God, who was born of a virgin

who remained still a virgin after His birth. Cleave to this sweet mother who conceived so great a Son. The heavens could not contain Him, but He rested in the slender womb of her body, and she nursed Him in her virginal lap. Is there any man who is not moved to indignation when he sees the deceit of the enemy of us all? for he strives with passing shadows and vain-glory to make that seem as naught which is greater than heaven itself.

For I believe most truly, by God's grace, that the soul of a faithful man, that most noble thing in all creation, is even greater than heaven, since heaven together with all created things cannot contain the Creator; whereas He makes His dwelling-place and His throne in one single, faithful soul, because of that love which the wicked man has not. So says the Word of Truth; "He that loveth Me is loved by My Father, and I will love him, and we will come to him and will make our abode with him."

The glorious Virgin bore in her virginal womb the God of virgins and true man. So you, by imitating her in humility and poverty, are able mystically to bear within you the same Lord, containing Him by whom all things are contained, and more and more fully will He dwell within

you and within those who spurn the riches of this world.

Kings and queens of this world are greatly led astray, for though their pride reaches even up to heaven, and touches the firmament with its head, yet will they perish in the end like filth.

I come now to the matters of which you asked me to speak—that is, on which feasts is it allowed to us to make a variety in our food. I will write them for you, my beloved, according as our holy Father Francis taught us to keep them in a special manner. Thus is it then :

Apart from the weak and infirm (to these he taught and commanded every kind of food must be given with all care) it is not lawful for any of us who are in health and strength to use any foods other than fasting foods, whether on ordinary days or on festivals. We must fast every day except on Sundays and Christmas Day, and on these days we may take two meals. It is the same for Thursdays in the customary times, according to the pleasure of each one, so that she to whom it seems good not to fast, must not be compelled to do so. But we who are in good health fast daily, except on Sundays, the Feast of the Nativity, and the whole of Paschal time, as we are taught by the rule of our holy Father

Francis. Neither are we bound to fast on the festivals of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Apostles unless they fall on a Friday. And, as I have said before, those of us who are strong and in good health ever use fasting foods. Nevertheless, since our body is not of brass, nor our strength like stone, but we are weak and subject to bodily infirmities, I earnestly beseech you in Our Lord to refrain from the great rigour of abstinence which I know you follow, so that while you live and hope in Our Lord you may give to Him a service full of reason and that your sacrifice may be seasoned with the salt of prudence.

Farewell in Our Lord, according to your own desire. Commend my sisters and myself to your holy sisters.

No. IV

Clare, the worthless handmaid of God, and unprofitable servant of His handmaidens who dwell in the monastery of San Damiano, sends salutation to Agnes, the most serene Queen, the half of my soul and most special sanctuary of my heart's love. My sweet mother, daughter more loved than all others, may you sing the new canticle before the throne of God and the Lamb, in the company of the other holy virgins and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

O mother and daughter, spouse of the King of all ages, marvel not that I have not written to you so often as you and my own soul could desire, and think not within yourself that the great love for you with which I burn has any whit become less. For I love you even as your mother's heart did love you. This only has hindered me, the scarcity of messengers and the great dangers of the road.

But now having the occasion of writing to your charity, I exult and rejoice with you, O spouse of Christ, in the joy of the Holy Ghost. The first St. Agnes was united to the spotless Lamb who taketh away the sins of the

world, and so also you, O happy one, it has been given to enjoy the heavenly union of a like espousal. The hosts of heaven are amazed at this espousal, the desire of it draws all to itself, the remembrance of it is satisfying, the excellence of it fills with all sweetness, the fragrance of it quickens the dead to life; the glorious vision of it beatifies all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the splendour of glory, the brightness of eternal light, and the untarnished mirror.

Every day look into this mirror, O Queen, spouse of Christ Jesus, and often contemplate your countenance therein, that within and without you may adorn yourself with the virtues of diverse flowers, and clothe yourself with the garments meet for the daughter and the spouse of the King most high.

O best beloved, it will be seemly in you with grace divine to delight in gazing into such a mirror. Draw near and look therein, first at Jesus lying in a manger in all poverty and swathed in poor clothes. O marvel of humility, O marvel of poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid upon a manger! Within your mirror look upon the most joyful poverty of holy humility. For love of it He

bore much hardship to redeem the human race. Then look therein upon the ineffable love, whereby He willed to suffer on the wood of the Cross, and even to undergo a shameful death upon it. Your mirror, fixed on the wood of the Cross, reproaches those that pass by, saying: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." Let us join our heart and our voice in answer to Him, as He makes His plaint, "I will be mindful of Thee and remember, and my soul shall languish within me."

O Queen, glow with this ardour of love, and remember the ineffable joys and wealth and unending honour of the King of Heaven. Sigh with your great longing and cry out from your heart's love: "Draw me after Thee. I will run in the odour of Thy ointments, O heavenly Spouse, nor will I halt until Thou bring me into Thy wine-cellar, until Thy left hand shall be under my head and Thy right hand shall embrace me. Kiss me with the kiss of Thy mouth."

But while you thus contemplate, remember your poor mother, and know that your memory is joyfully written for ever on the tablets of my heart. I hold thee most beloved of all. What more can I say. Let the tongue of my

body be silent, and let the tongue of my spirit speak, O most blessed daughter. For no bodily tongue can speak the love I bear to you. Wherefore what I have written haltingly do you receive with goodwill and graciously, and call to mind only the mother's love with which I burn daily towards you and your daughters.

Honoured Sister Agnes, diligently commend in Our Lord my daughters and myself to your daughters. Farewell, my best beloved. Pray graciously for us, with your daughters at the throne of our great Lord.

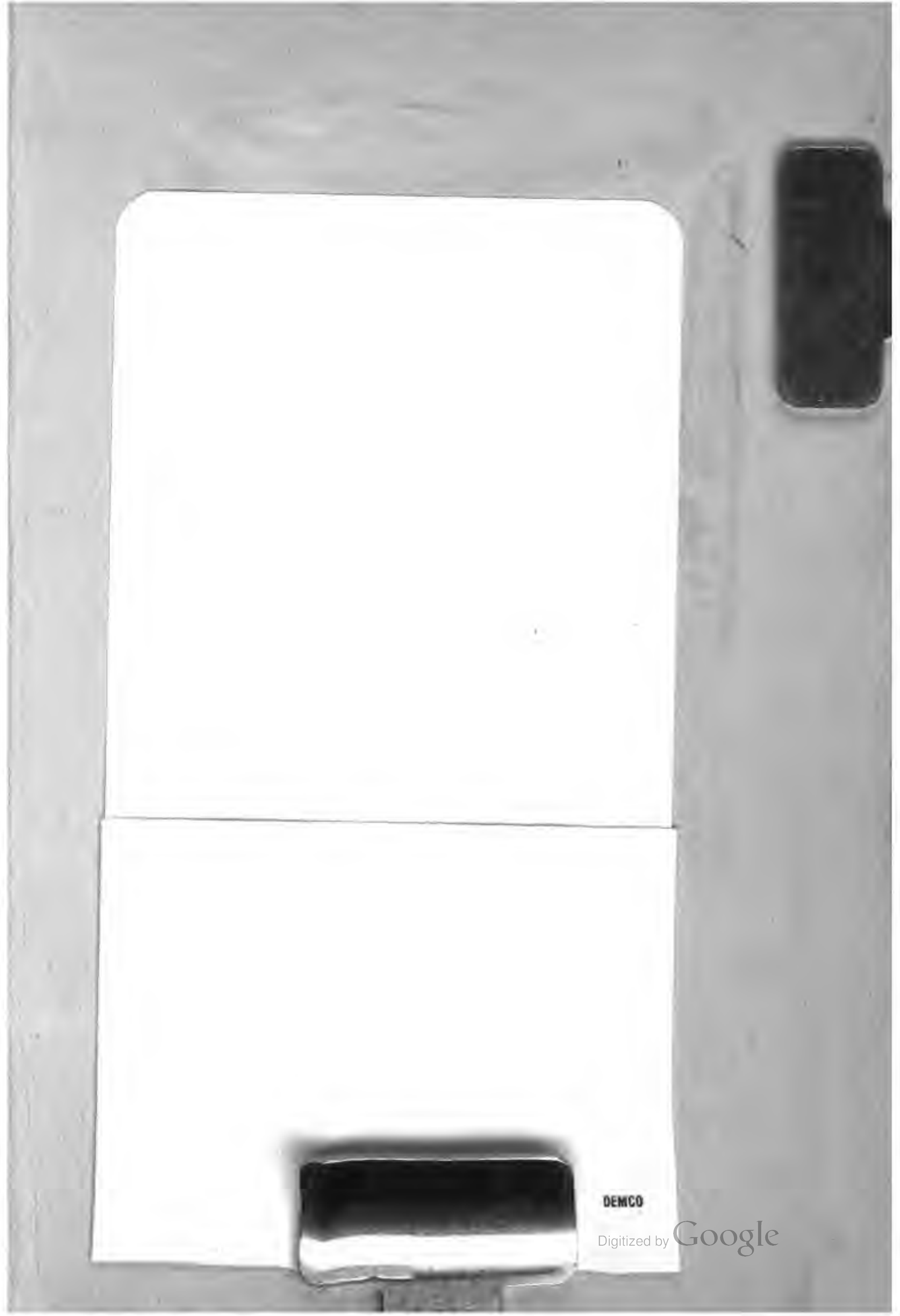
I commend these our messengers, our brothers most dear, Brother Amato, pleasing to God and men, and Brother Bonagnia, with all my heart to your charity.

THE END

Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
Edinburgh & London

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